BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY: AN EQUIPPING MODEL FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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by

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United Theological Seminary, May 2026

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ABSTRACT

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The Gethsemane Baptist Church community has evolved its demographics, and church leaders have not connected with the surrounding community. This project proposes that if the leaders of Gethsemane Baptist Church participate in an biblical hospitality journey aimed toward increasing a spirit of humility in serving, illuminating the importance of being hospitable to people regardless of economic, racial, societal differences, and enhancing community engagement, then leaders will be equipped to engage the surrounding community. Nine participants will engage in a six-week biblical hospitality experience focused on essential teachings for engagement and disciple-making.

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To my church family, Gethsemane Baptist Church, thank you for your support and patience through this process. Also, to the participants who shared their time and gave great insight that helped to inform my project, thank you so very much. To my wonderful family, my children Michael, William, Jamar, Shaqouia, and Ayriana, thank you for your patience and for cheering me on. Lastly, to my wonderful wife who has been with me every step of the way through the ups and downs, words cannot express the gratitude I have for you. Who would have imagined? We did it!

DEDICATION

I dedicate this body of work to my mother and father, the late Odell and Veronica Flowers. Although you both have gone on, you have been with me in this part of my life's journey. Although life for me started slow, look at where I am now. I pray that you are proud.

INTRODUCTION

This examination of the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations presented informs the development of this project titled Biblical Hospitality: An Equipping Model for Community Engagement. Specifically, the academic exploration of the four foundations undergirds this project by addressing the issue of Gethsemane Baptist Church's capacity to connect and make a spiritual impact in the surrounding community, which has been affected by demographic changes due to gentrification. As the community has undergone growth and revitalization, Gethsemane Baptist Church has lacked intentionality in demonstrating hospitality and welcoming newcomers.

A solution to this problem, as presented in this project, is to design a biblical hospitality training model for the church. This model has the potential to help church leaders cultivate a spirit of humility in serving, understand the importance of being hospitable to people regardless of their economic, racial, and societal differences, and enhance their engagement with the surrounding community. Specifically, this project will guide a group of eight individuals through a six-week biblical hospitality experience centered on fellowship and essential teaching for engagement and making disciples of Christ.

Chapter Two, the biblical foundations provide an exegesis of Luke 14:7-14, which presents Jesus' perspective on the essential need for hospitality from the people

of God to the community. The parable in this passage highlights the transformative power of hospitality and stands in direct opposition to contemporary societal norms and values regarding inclusion and equity. In the context of this narrative, Jesus is invited to the home of a prominent Pharisee, presenting an opportunity to discuss the virtue of hospitality. Through a series of parabolic teachings, Jesus encourages the audience to reconsider their attitudes toward social status, inclusion, and the practice of genuine hospitality.

This researcher believes that genuine, unselfish hospitality to engage our surrounding community is refreshing and achievable with an intentional plan. This approach is biblical and will be demonstrated in this project. Developing a biblical hospitality model to equip church leaders to engage the surrounding community will significantly enhance Gethsemane Baptist Church's ability to show hospitality and welcome newcomers. This model can also be replicated in other churches to reimagine, revitalize, and reconnect with their surrounding communities.

Chapter Three, from a historical perspective, the biblical hospitality approach to equipping church leaders to engage with the surrounding community can be traced back to the practice of serving others and cross-cultural discipleship demonstrated by Jean-Henri Dunant, a Swiss businessman renowned for being a social activist and humanitarian visionary. He is also well known for his involvement in founding the Red Cross and is regarded as a pioneer of the modern concept of hospitality and humanitarianism. His life and work epitomize the power of compassion, empathy, and action in alleviating human suffering. Moreover, his life exemplifies the principles of

cross-cultural discipleship through his Christian convictions and his willingness to share and demonstrate through action.

Although hospitality is often viewed through the lens of the hotel and restaurant industries, Jean-Henri Dunant reveals it through the process of serving those in need, regardless of race or culture. This historical perspective is explored through the presentation of Dunant's life, including his religious impact, cross-cultural discipleship, business ventures, the founding of the Red Cross, and his honors. Research indicates a correlation between Jean-Henri Dunant's life of serving with inclusive compassion and the biblical concept of hospitality aimed at equipping church leaders to engage with their surrounding community, evident in his humanitarian efforts to organize aid for wounded soldiers without regard for nationality. The reality is that equipping church leaders to engage the surrounding community requires educating them and church members about the significance of biblical hospitality for the purpose of engagement and making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Four, the theological foundations focused on ecclesiology and discipleship. This section highlighted the theological significance of equipping church leaders to engage the surrounding community through the development of a biblical hospitality model. This researcher believes that individuals need to be educated about the church so they can understand how God operates within it, learn how the church can assist them, feel welcomed by it, and become involved in its activities. The desired outcome is for individuals to grow spiritually and become disciples of Jesus Christ.

This section examines the importance of teaching ecclesiology and discipleship in practicing cross-cultural hospitality, as an assessment of Gethsemane Baptist Church's

ministry operations has shown a lack of a biblical hospitality plan and strategy for engaging the surrounding community. This project aims to develop intentional relationships with individuals in the local community to make them disciples of Jesus Christ, regardless of cultural differences. While cross-cultural hospitality is crucial, it may require significant training within the church. For the leaders of Gethsemane Baptist Church, the call to teach the theology of ecclesiology and discipleship offers a unique opportunity to become a transformational church, build meaningful relationships, practice cross-cultural hospitality, and emerge prepared to engage the surrounding community.

Chapter Five, the study of the non-church related field of customer service has influenced this project. This research highlighted The Walt Disney Company's dedication to a culture of belonging. Specifically, just as Walt Disney's commitment to excellence in customer service has significantly impacted the entertainment industry, changes in the mindset, teaching, and practices of church leaders can enhance church and community connections. Analyzing The Walt Disney Company's customer service strategies provides this researcher with training tools to equip leaders of the Gethsemane Baptist Church with the understanding that building relationships and creating meaningful experiences are crucial for engaging people in the surrounding community.

Creativity has proven to be an effective core value of The Walt Disney Company. Likewise, creative means of discipleship are essential to engaging diverse cultures in the church and in ministry. Just as The Walt Disney Company has developed a groundbreaking, world-renowned customer service model for customers of all cultures, this project will involve developing a ministry model that has the potential to develop a customer service-focused culture at the Gethsemane Baptist Church.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

The process of an introspective reflection on my life, writing a spiritual autobiography and thoughtfully examining my current ministry context has been enlightening. Documenting the intricate details of my personal life has revealed how certain events have shaped my journey. Due to my parents relocating my sister and me frequently during our childhood, I have come to realize that I never truly connected with any particular group or even my extended family, to say the least. I now understand that I have always yearned for a sense of belonging, a place where I felt connected or part of a greater whole. On the rare occasions when I did feel a sense of belonging to a group, I was very protective of that bond and hesitant to let others join us. It was as though I wanted to keep our group close-knit and guarded, careful not to disrupt what we had. Considering this in light of my current ministry context, previous ministry experiences, and personal life events, I can identify similar patterns where the congregations I have had the privilege to pastor might have felt the same way.

At Liberty Hill Baptist Church, where I pastored for eleven years, we experienced significant growth during my first year, with several new members joining the ministry. Smaller groups of long-standing members, often referred to as “cliques,” became very possessive of “their” church. Some members had been there for five years or more, yet

the long-time members still considered them newcomers. The longtime members feared allowing these newer attendees into their groups, which hindered the newcomers' ability to assimilate and find a sense of belonging in worship and ministry. This led to an "us" versus "them" dynamic. Most of the newer members came from larger northern cities, bringing with them progressive ideas that sometimes conflicted with the traditions of the southern rural church.

In my current context at Gethsemane Baptist Church, we are facing persistent challenges, particularly the growing divide between the "us" and "them" dichotomy as it relates to demographic changes in the community due to gentrification. The church is situated in the heart of Davidson, North Carolina, which has become predominantly a community of white college students and professionals. In this writing, I will explore how my ministry context and personal spiritual journey intersect, leading to my ministry project entitled "Biblical Hospitality: An Equipping Model for Community Engagement."

Context

Gethsemane Baptist Church

Gethsemane Baptist Church is located in Davidson, North Carolina, between its downtown area and the major state route SR77. Davidson is situated lakeside on Lake Norman in northern Mecklenburg County, about twenty miles north of Charlotte.[1] The pastors of Gethsemane Baptist Church from 1919 to 1965 were Reverend Butler,

[1] Town of Davidson, "West Davidson Local History," Town of Davidson, https://www.townofdavidson.org/DocumentCenter/View/593/West-Davidson-Local-History.

Reverend Davis, Reverend Davidson, Reverend Barber, Reverend Black, Reverend Long, Reverend Thomas Nash, Reverend J.W. Walker, and Reverend Clement Morris, Sr.

The longest-serving pastor of Gethsemane Baptist Church was Reverend Clement Morris Sr., who held the position from 1965 until his death in 2000. Under his leadership, the church experienced tremendous growth. In 1974, the church purchased an additional parcel of land in Davidson, and on April 1, 1977, the Gethsemane family marched from the Potts Street location to the current structure located on Jetton Street. In February 2001, Reverend Chiffie Tumlin was chosen as pastor and served until July 2003. In 2004, Reverend Ernest E. Jeffries was appointed as pastor. He implemented progressive changes at Gethsemane and remained until 2018. I was then elected as pastor in October 2019.

Gethsemane Baptist Church takes pride in its non-traditional and progressive approach to ministry activities and outreach efforts. Within the community, Gethsemane is viewed as a body of believers dedicated to community service and acts as a vital resource for local needs. Some outreach initiatives include “Warm the Homeless," which distributes donations of coats, hats, gloves, and socks; monthly meal service at the Center of Hope Women’s Shelter; and providing meals to college students in partnership with InterVarsity, an on-campus ministry. Furthermore, Gethsemane collaborates with other churches in Davidson to reach people in need both within and beyond our community while meeting the needs of our congregation. Gethsemane has not confined itself to the church building. As mentioned earlier, we are involved in numerous outreach programs and enriching activities that extend into the surrounding areas. Additionally, we serve as

a HUB for community political and town meetings. Our mission is to be a church that extends hope and unconditional love through biblical discipleship. We are the H.U.B.

Demographics

Gethsemane's congregation has always included people from within the Davidson community and the immediate surrounding towns, such as Cornelius, Mooresville, Concord, and Huntersville. However, due to demographic changes and the passing of long-time members, the number of residents of Davidson has decreased. The congregation now consists predominantly of people from those surrounding towns, along with Charlotte, Statesville, and as far as Denver, North Carolina. Members range from young families with children to middle-aged adults to elderly people who are seventy-five years of age and older.

In the mid-1900s, Black residents made up 33% of Davidson's population. According to the U.S. 2010 Census, the racial demographics consist of 80% White, 10% Black, 4% Hispanic, 2.9% Asian, and 1.4% identifying as two or more races.[2] Gethsemane, along with other churches in Davidson, faces the challenge of finding effective ways to engage the diverse demographics of newcomers relocating to Davidson. There are two populations that area churches have not reached: the growing Hispanic community and a significant portion of the 1,950 primarily White students enrolled at Davidson College. While the social needs of the growing Hispanic population are being addressed by key community agencies, such as the Housing Coalition and the Ada Jenkins Community Center, there is a considerable gap in addressing their spiritual needs.

[2] Census, "Davidson NC: Population Census," U.S. 2010 Census, https://www.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=37.

This small town has experienced growth, and by 1995, the construction of large luxury housing developments led to a notable increase in the population. In just the past fifteen years, the area surrounding Gethsemane Baptist Church transformed from a vast expanse of greenspace to include housing developments, townhouses, a hotel, two schools, an apartment complex, and shops (a region referred to as Circles @30).[3] People were attracted to the small-town character and values, complemented by an upscale touch.

Population

The estimated 2023 population within North Carolina is 11,010,191. The 2028 projection would see the area grow by 422,229 to a total population of 11,432,420.[4] The estimated 2023 population within Davidson is 20,347. The 2028 projection would see the area grow by 2,270 to a total population of 22,617.[5] The population within Davidson is growing somewhat faster than the statewide growth rate. While Davidson is projected to grow by 11.2% in the next five years, the state is projected to grow by 3.8%.[6]

[3] Town of Davidson, "West Davidson Local History," Town of Davidson, https://www.townofdavidson.org/DocumentCenter/View/593/West-Davidson-Local-History.

[4] The ExecutiveInsite Report-5, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 2.

[5] The ExecutiveInsite Report-5, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 2.

[6] The ExecutiveInsite Report-5, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 2.

Marital Status

In the Davidson community, the current year estimate of marital status reveals a community of adults more likely to be married than the state average for adults increasing 4.4% by 2028.[7] The percentage of single never married is lower than the state average for adults fifteen years and older by -5.4% by 2028. Divorce is less prevalent than the statewide average.[8]

Family Households

Family households provide an additional hint about a community's changing dynamics. If family household growth follows population growth, then it would be reasonable to assume that the increasing population per household comes from additional children. However, within the Davidson community, this is not the case. Family households are not growing as fast as the population, suggesting that the growth may be the result of the growth of non-family adult households.

Population Per Household

The relationship between population and households provides insight into how the community is changing. When the population grows faster than the number of households, it suggests an increase in the number of people per household. This can occur only when more individuals are added, either through births or other processes, such as

[7] The ExecutiveInsite Report-5, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 2.

[8] The ExecutiveInsite-5, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 10.

young adults living together in roommate situations or returning to live with their parents. In some communities, this can happen when multiple families reside in the same dwelling unit. Among households with children under eighteen, married couple households are decreasing as a percentage, while single-parent households are on the rise. By the year 2028, it is projected that married couple households with children under eighteen will decrease by 0.3%, while single-parent households will increase by 0.3%.[9]

Average Household Income and Per Capita Income

In Davidson, the estimated average household income for the current year is $183,351. This average is projected to grow by 16.7% to $214,015. The ongoing increase in household income has transformed this former mill and college town into an affluent community. The difference between Davidson's average household income and that of North Carolina is striking, as the estimated per capita income in North Carolina for this year is only $62,240. Although this year's income is significantly higher, the per capita income projection in North Carolina is slightly greater than Davidson's by 17.3%, averaging $73,004 in North Carolina.[10]

Racial/ Ethnic Trends

According to research from the ExecutiveInsite Reports on ethnic trends, there are four major groups represented: White, Black/African American, Asian, and Hispanic. Of

[9] The ExecutiveInsite-5, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 8.

[10] The ExecutiveInsite-5, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 7.

these groups, the White (Non-Hispanic) population in Davidson is projected to decline slightly by 0.6% over the next five years, despite making up 83% of the total population. The next largest ethnic group, Black/African American (Non-Hispanic), is expected to remain relatively stable, representing 7% of the population, while Asian individuals account for 3% and Hispanic/Latino individuals for 4%. As mentioned earlier, the Black/African American population was 33% of the overall population.[11]

Religious Beliefs About God

The town of Davidson has faith or belief in God at its core. The ReligiousInsites Report presents a ranked list of beliefs about God based on the participants' priorities and agreements.

1. God is love and invites the world into a loving relationship.
2. I have a relationship with one living God.
3. God is the full realization of human potential.
4. The forces of nature and the spirits within the creation are God for me.
5. God is a higher state of consciousness that people may achieve.
6. I believe God created a literal heaven and hell.
7. Everyone and everything is god.
8. I believe there are many gods.
9. I'm unsure/undecided about whether a god exists.
10. I don't believe a god exists; the material universe is all that is.
11. I believe God created the world but takes no further part in it.[12]

The ratio and strengths of agreement varied for each belief as indicated below:

> For belief number 1, the ratio of agreement was 4.3, having a very strong agreement. Number 2's ratio was 2.1 with a strong agreement. Numbers 3 and 4 had ratios of 1.1 and 1.0, having neutral agreements. Numbers 5 and 6 ratios were 1.0, also having a neutral agreement. Number 7 had below 1 with a ratio 0.4, indicating a weak agreement. Numbers 8-10 ratios were below 1, all having very

[11] The ExecutiveInsite-5, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 7.

[12] The ReligiousInsite, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 2.

> weak agreements. And lastly, number 11 ratio was also below 1 with 0.1 ratio, having extremely weak agreement.[13]

The Religious Insites Report also prioritized a list concerning beliefs about Jesus, ranked the same as the previous list:

1. People in the church do not behave as Jesus would behave.
2. Belief in Jesus does not require participation in a church.
3. Jesus was both divine and human.
4. Jesus was the expected Jewish Messiah.
5. Jesus actually rose from the dead as the Bible teaches.
6. Jesus rules now and always as Lord of heaven and earth.
7. I have a personal relationship with Jesus.
8. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life while on earth.
9. Jesus is the only way for human salvation from sin.
10. Jesus was a good and wise moral teacher but no more.
11. Jesus was a great prophet only.[14]

The ratio and strengths of agreement varied for each belief as indicated below:

> For belief number 1, the ratio of agreement was 7.0, having a very strong agreement. Number 2's ratio was 5.3 with a very strong agreement. Number 3 had ratios of 2.9, having a strong agreement, number 4 had a ratio of 2.3, having strong agreements. Numbers 5 and 6 ratios were 1.9 and 1.8, having somewhat strong agreements. Numbers 7 and 8 both had ratios of 1.2, having neutral agreements. Number 9 had a ratio of 1.1, having a neutral agreement, 10 had a ratio of 0.5, having a weak agreement and lastly number 11 was also below 1 with a 0.3 ratio, having very weak agreement.[15]

These studies indicate that within the Davidson community, there is a general belief in God and Jesus, accompanied by a moderate understanding of their true identity and nature. However, as the report states, the church needs to provide a stronger witness of the character of Jesus.

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[13] The ReligiousInsite, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 2.

[14] The ReligiousInsite, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 2.

[15] The ReligiousInsite, "Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, The American Beliefs Study," US Census Bureau, https://www.missionInsite.com, 3.

The dynamics of the town of Davidson present a unique but ever-growing challenge for traditional neighborhood churches. According to the above-mentioned reports, Davidson remains attractive to newcomers because of its small-town feel and personality. Although the reports project a slight decline in its primary residents, the town will not experience much diversity growth. The findings also indicate that the town of Davidson is attractive to married and single high earners and will continue that trend for years to come.

Ministry Journey

As I reflect on my life and formative years of faith and ministry, I realize that for as long as I can remember, I have been involved in some aspect of church ministry. My parents were Christians and made it a point to keep my sister and me active in ministry, whether in youth ministry, the choir, or Vacation Bible School. I was baptized at the age of eleven at the Isle of Patmos Baptist Church in Northeast Washington, D.C. During this time, baptism was more about reaching a certain age when one should be baptized than about understanding and believing in salvation. Although I did not fully grasp the meaning of salvation or what baptism truly meant for a believer, I was encouraged and taught what to recite rather than having a genuine acceptance and belief that Jesus died on the cross for my sins and the full implications of that. As I grew older, much like most teenagers, I drifted away from the church and ventured out to experience the world. After moments of trial, falling, and failing, I felt a gentle nudge from the Holy Spirit to return to the basic foundations of faith in Jesus.

Feeling overwhelmed by conviction, I became aware of my need for help and forgiveness. At twenty-four, I reconnected with the local church and recommitted myself to Christ. I began attending New Hope Baptist Church with my family under the leadership of Pastor Ervin Milsaps. It felt wonderful to be back in church as I got involved in the youth and teen ministries. Since I enjoyed singing, I also joined the young adult choir and served in other areas of ministry as needed. Everything seemed to be going well. While serving in ministry, I realized I was being called to the preaching ministry. I made time to speak with the pastor and shared my heart. He then encouraged me to keep serving and to continue praying.

During this period of service, I encountered challenges as the ministry split due to unrest between some congregation members and the pastor. Shortly after, we established Greater Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church, I had the opportunity to deliver my first sermon. It was at this stage of my life that my ministry work truly began. As we developed the church's ministries, I was tasked with furthering the youth and teen ministries. Initially, we held our gatherings at my house, incorporating fun activities, movie nights, Bible studies, and discussions with the youth about challenges in faith. As I worked in ministry, I was encouraged to pursue higher education, so I enrolled in Wingate College. I was not accepted initially, but after arranging a meeting with the Dean and convincing him that all I needed was a chance, I was accepted and enrolled. After the first semester, I was summoned to the Dean’s office, unsure of the reason. When I arrived, he extended congratulations for my strong performance. I remember leaving his office with a profound sense of joy and accomplishment because I had been told that I was not college material.

My family moved to the Washington D.C. area for better education and career opportunities. After relocating, we looked for a church to meet our growing need for worship and to connect with fellow believers, where we could continue to grow spiritually and serve. The first church we visited became the one we joined after three visits. We became members of Glendale Baptist Church in Landover, Maryland, under the leadership of Pastor Anthony G. Maclin. The church later transformed into The Sanctuary at Kingdom Square. I quickly got involved, serving on the ministerial staff and in other ministry areas, which provided a significant growth opportunity. My experience at Glendale was exceptionally fulfilling as I worked in various ministerial roles, including serving as the youth minister, then overseeing the teen ministry, starting the New Life Ministry for recent high school and college graduates, and eventually leading the Young Adult Ministry, which involved teaching a young adult Bible study.

Due to the Dotcom fallout and an effort to avoid layoffs, I was relocated back to the Charlotte area. Once there, I reconnected with Greater Fellowship, which now had a new pastor, Reverend James Brunson. Upon my return, I immediately resumed serving in ministry, teaching, preaching, and leading the Men's Ministry. One Sunday, after being given the opportunity to preach following the benediction, I was approached about a preaching opportunity at a church that needed a pastor. The plan was for me to serve as an interim until they selected a pastor. Initially, I was not considered for the position because I was ordained as a Baptist minister, while the church's denomination was Church of God. Three months into my service as interim, the church leadership came to my office and asked me to consider becoming the pastor. As God's providence would

have it, and after speaking with my pastor, I accepted the position at a small rural church called Marshville First Church of God in 2004.

The Marshville church was a challenging experience that compelled me to grow quickly in ministry and put into practice what I had learned. It was a small family church reminiscent of the television show "The Hatfields and McCoys." One family managed the church, while the other family opposed it. By God's grace, the church was reorganized to benefit the Kingdom and the community. Amid the turmoil in Marshville, we still managed to accomplish some long-standing goals. We renovated the fellowship hall and replaced the church's entry doors. We were actively involved in the community through evangelistic and outreach efforts. At this point in my ministerial journey, a need arose for greater knowledge to be better equipped for serving in ministry. After discussing it with my wife and colleagues, I decided to return to school and further my education. I applied to Shaw University to continue my academic pursuits. In 2010, I completed my Bachelor of Science degree in Religion and Philosophy at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. After serving as pastor for four years in Marshville, I was called to Liberty Hill Baptist Church in Waxhaw, North Carolina, where I served for eleven years.

Serving Liberty Hill has been among my greatest challenges and most rewarding moments in ministry, as we experienced monumental growth both spiritually and numerically. We served the community through various outreach programs, such as back-to-school giveaways, clothing and coat drives, feeding initiatives, and a mobile food pantry. We also demonstrated the love of God by hosting community events, including car shows and Gospel and Jazz concerts, welcoming everyone regardless of race or religious affiliation. We established new ministries and collaborative efforts, such as the

Love Never Fails Couples Ministry, which involved three local churches. Additionally, we were fortunate enough to purchase a property and renovate the sanctuary and fellowship hall. While at Liberty Hill, I continued my educational journey and obtained a Master of Divinity degree from the M. Christopher White School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, North Carolina, graduating in May 2016. My experience at Gardner-Webb allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of theology and the principles I value. While studying at Gardner-Webb, I had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land, experiencing and walking in the places where the stories of scripture unfolded. My time in seminary also made me realize that I will always be a student of scripture. After serving eleven years, it was time to move again and embrace new opportunities and challenges. In January 2020, I was called to Gethsemane Baptist Church (also known as GBC of Lake Norman), and one of the most appealing aspects of this ministry was its emphasis on outreach.

My journey thus far has been an informative experience through serving and attending school. I have encountered some wonderful successes and some educational failures, but overall, it has been beneficial. Having had the opportunity to serve in three ministries, I have learned how to navigate diverse experiences, as well as various ministry cultures and contexts. Through my educational journey as a student of scripture and my experiences in ministry, I have gained a clearer understanding of what ministry truly means. Ministry is often taken out of context; it is not about how it serves you, but how it serves others. From the Greek context, the word ministry comes from “diakonia,” which means “to serve.” It evokes the imagery of someone taking on the humble task of serving tables. I believe and am convinced that the best way to serve God is by serving

God's people unconditionally, irrespective of race, culture, or economic status, both foreign and domestic. In ministry, we should always strive to meet the needs of people in all aspects: spiritually, emotionally, physically, socially, and economically, bringing hope and the love of God to everyone.

Development of Synergy

Having moved from place to place in my life, I have always desired a sense of belonging and connectedness. I lived in communities that are predominantly urban Black, as well as areas with mixed demographics. I worked in environments that ranged from mixed demographics to primarily white. I studied at both an HBCU and a PWI. I shopped in urban stores, marketplaces, and malls that primarily served white communities. In today's era, many Black communities, where the Black church once served predominantly Black populations, have transitioned due to gentrification into neighborhoods that are mainly white. However, this does not exclusively apply to Black communities, as there are also some white communities affected. This raises the question of how the Black church disciples and ministers to the predominantly white community in which it resides.

The Old and New Testaments clearly express God's desire for salvation to be shared with humankind through His love, regardless of race or culture. For salvation to be shared, there is a need to bridge the divide between the church and the community, irrespective of color or culture. In light of the current racial divide, there should be a significant emphasis on evangelizing communities that do not always resemble us. The Bible provides ample evidence for sharing God's love and ways with all people. Below

are scriptural examples where we are called to be the light, sharing the way and the gospel as witnesses making disciples of all people. Paul makes it clear that the Lord is the Lord of all people. Romans 10:12-13 indicate, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."[16] Isaiah 49:6 states, "He says: It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Psalm 67:1-5 says:

> May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! (Ps. 67:1-5).

Matthew 24:14 states, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

We, the church, are commissioned in Matthew 28:19 to "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In the community where GBC resides, there is a significant need for making disciples and ministering to the residents. The scriptural examples highlighted above demonstrate the importance of connecting the church and the community, emphasizing that this is a mandate. The town of Davidson has an underlying desire to

[16] Biblical citations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, Romans 10:12-13.

bridge the gap between races, cultures, and religions. In light of this scriptural mandate, the black church should prioritize discipleship within the community and form intentional connections, regardless of ethnic differences. Due to the divide between my current ministerial context and the community, my project will develop a biblical hospitality model to equip church leaders to engage with the surrounding community, breaking down racial and social divides. What I hope to learn from this project is how to effectively and efficiently lead my congregation to engage the community in which it resides.

Conclusion

Gethsemane Baptist Church has been in existence for one hundred eighteen years. It has witnessed significant changes in the surrounding community, including the construction of homes, apartments, businesses, and schools, as well as shifts in the demographics of the residents. As a result of these changes, the church has lost its connection with those living nearby. I believe that if the church intentionally engages the community through fellowship, evangelism, worship, and the design of its programs with a focus on inclusivity, it will foster a connection with the new community population.

After conducting research, I will select a team from my leadership and congregation that is genuinely interested in the project of developing a biblical hospitality model for equipping church leaders to engage with the surrounding community. We will hold six sessions to establish purpose and strategy for extending hospitality to this community. I believe that the work of ministry should intentionally include all people, as scripture mandates. The church has become accustomed to developing a ministry that

focuses on a community represented in the church pews on Sunday. Through the research collected in this project, I hope that the church will, at the very least, be better equipped to engage the community in a more meaningful and intentional way.

To effectively implement the proposed intentional hospitality model, it will be essential to involve key leaders from Gethsemane Baptist Church and individuals from the surrounding community, representing both the ministry and the people the church aims to engage, serve, and disciple. The participation of these core groups will ultimately foster a spirit of humility in serving, highlight the importance of being hospitable to all individuals regardless of their economic, racial, or societal differences, and strengthen engagement with the surrounding community.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

This section on the Biblical Foundations aims to present a New Testament pericope that has been studied and relates to the topic of this project. Herein lies the problem this project addresses: As communities across the country have shifted in demographics for various reasons, including gentrification, the neighborhood church has lost its connection with the community in which it is situated. As the community has experienced growth and revitalization, there has been a lack of intentionality from the neighborhood church in demonstrating hospitality and welcoming newcomers. The consequence of this lack of intentionality is that there are churches that do not understand the community or its needs, resulting in an inability to create a hospitality model that fosters connections for further evangelistic and discipleship efforts. Gethsemane Baptist Church is experiencing this problem, leading to an inability to connect and have spiritual impact within the community due to the changes in the community's demographics caused by the effects of gentrification.

This project aims to develop a biblical hospitality model to equip church leaders to engage with the surrounding community. To effectively implement the proposed intentional hospitality model, it will be essential to involve key members and leaders of Gethsemane Baptist Church to represent the ministry. The participation of these core

groups will ultimately create an experience that fosters a spirit of humility in serving, highlights the importance of being hospitable to others regardless of economic, racial, and societal differences, and enhances engagement with the surrounding community.

This section provides an exegesis of Luke 14:7-14, which presents Jesus' perspective on the essential need for hospitality from the people of God to the community. Research on the Gospel narrative of Luke 14:7-14 has revealed a distinctive approach to hospitality that fundamentally addresses the church's interactions with the community, rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. The parable in this passage highlights the transformative power of hospitality and stands in direct opposition to current societal norms and values regarding inclusion and equity. Luke's Gospel vividly illustrates compassion and concern through a lens of inclusivity and generosity. In the context of this narrative, Jesus is invited to the home of a prominent Pharisee, presenting an opportunity to discuss the virtue of hospitality. Through a series of parabolic teachings, Jesus encourages the audience to reconsider their attitudes toward social status, inclusion, and the practice of genuine hospitality.

According to Pastor George Hendricks in his blog titled "10 Creative Ideas for Enhancing Church Hospitality" on godsverse.org "Church hospitality is not just a nice gesture; it has the potential to impact your entire congregation in profound ways. When visitors feel welcomed and included, they are more likely to return and become active members of your church community. Hospitality cultivates a sense of belonging and connection, which are crucial for building a strong and vibrant church family."[1]

[1] George Hendricks, "Ten Creative Ideas for Enhancing Church Hospitality," God's Verse, https://godsverse.org/10-creative-ideas-for-enhancing-church-hospitality/.

Hendricks further points out that, “In today’s fast-paced and increasingly disconnected world, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere in our churches has become more important than ever.” Hendricks presents ten creative ideas to enhance church hospitality and cultivate an environment that promotes connection and community, insisting that, “Hospitality is not just an event or program; it is a mindset and culture that should permeate every aspect of your church community. As you prioritize hospitality, you lay the foundation for a vibrant and inclusive congregation that fosters connection, growth, and transformation.”[2]

1. Create a welcoming atmosphere that instantly puts visitors at ease. Pay attention to the physical environment by ensuring your church is clean, well-maintained, and inviting. Consider incorporating comfortable seating areas, warm lighting, and welcoming signage to guide visitors through your space. Additionally, train your greeters and ushers to exude warmth, approachability, and genuine care when welcoming visitors. Provide clear and accessible information for visitors. Foster a sense of community within your church, encourage members to actively engage with visitors by introducing themselves, striking up conversations, and inviting them to participate in church activities.

2. Welcome visitors with a smile, a handshake, or even a hug (if appropriate) can go a long way in making them feel accepted and valued. Provide information about your church, such as brochures or welcome packets, so visitors have a sense of what to expect and how to get involved.

3. Develop strategies to connect with visitors and make them feel like they are immediately part of your church family. Consider assigning a “buddy” or mentor to each newcomer, someone who can guide them through the initial stages of their church journey. Host regular newcomer events or orientation sessions, where they can learn more about your church and meet other members.

4. Take a critical look at your signage and ensure it is easy to read, clearly indicates important areas (such as restrooms, children’s programs, and worship spaces), and provides a warm welcome. Incorporating visual elements, such as colorful graphics or images, can add a touch of creativity and make your signage more engaging.

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[2] George Hendricks, “Ten Creative Ideas for Enhancing Church Hospitality,” God’s Verse, https://godsverse.org/10-creative-ideas-for-enhancing-church-hospitality/.

5. In today's digital age, a visitor's first interaction with your church may be through your website. Designing a visitor-friendly website is essential for showcasing your church's hospitality. Ensure that your website is easy to navigate, provides clear information about service times, directions, and upcoming events, and features inspiring stories and testimonies from members. Incorporate welcoming images and videos to give visitors a glimpse into your church community.

6. Train and empower members to become hospitality ambassadors who actively promote a culture of welcoming in your church. Provide them with training on effective communication, active listening, and inclusive behavior. Encourage them to proactively engage with visitors, offering assistance and providing information. By empowering your members to be welcoming representatives, you create a community where hospitality becomes a shared responsibility.

7. Following up with first-time visitors is a critical step in nurturing relationships and fostering long-term engagement. Personalized follow-ups make visitors feel noticed and valued, showing them that you genuinely care about their experience. Send handwritten notes or emails expressing gratitude for their visit, and provide resources or further opportunities to get involved in your church community. Consider inviting them to small group gatherings or upcoming special events.

8. Go above and beyond in creating memorable guest experiences that leave a lasting impression. Host unique events and activities designed specifically for visitors, such as welcome luncheons, guided tours of the church, or open houses. Consider organizing special worship services that are accessible and relevant to a broad range of backgrounds and beliefs. These events help visitors feel connected, invited, and eager to return.

9. Crafting uplifting worship services is crucial in enhancing church hospitality. Ensure that your services are welcoming and inclusive, with music, prayers, and sermons that speak to all visitors, regardless of their backgrounds or beliefs. Incorporate diverse cultural elements, encourage active participation, and provide opportunities for visitors to connect with others. By creating a worship experience that resonates with everyone, you create an environment where all feel valued and included.

10. Cultural diversity is a beautiful aspect of church communities. Embrace and celebrate the differences within your church family by incorporating multicultural elements into your services and events. Give opportunities for members to share their cultural traditions, songs, dances, and stories. Foster an environment of curiosity, learning, and appreciation for other cultures. By valuing and embracing diversity, your church becomes a place where all feel honored and welcomed.[3]

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[3] George Hendricks, "Ten Creative Ideas for Enhancing Church Hospitality," God's Verse, https://godsverse.org/10-creative-ideas-for-enhancing-church-hospitality/.

In a blog post titled "What Exactly is Biblical Hospitality?" John Ravan provides this definition of biblical hospitality: "The welcoming and fellowshipping with believers and non-believers out of truth and love for Jesus Christ so that they may see Christ more clearly and/or so they will join us as exiles themselves (or join us as believers)."[4] Ravan further emphasizes that biblical hospitality is evident throughout scripture, noting that:

> Early in the Old Testament, we see the example of Abraham welcoming strangers to rest after their long journey (Gn. 18:2-8). Further along, we also see this form of hospitality commanded in the act of tithing food (Dt. 14:28-29). From the prophet Isaiah, we even see hospitality as clothing the naked (Is. 58:7). In the New Testament, we see the early church regularly gathering together around a meal in order to fellowship and grow together spiritually (Acts 2:42-47). This example of gathering together was set forth by Jesus himself who never owned a home in order to host guests but still found ways to share a meal with those interested in his teachings (Lk. 19:5-6).[5]

The conclusion summarizes these biblical principles for developing an intentional hospitality model that equips leaders to engage with the surrounding community.

Exegesis

This section includes an exegesis of Luke 14:7-14. Luke's gospel is part of the synoptic tradition because it shares common narratives, themes, and structures as Matthew and Mark but also retains a unique perspective in how it portrays Jesus' life. Additionally, similar to the other Gospels, it has a chronological framework highlighting the life and key moments of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection. The selected passage, according to John Nolland, "is known only to Luke accept for a version in

[4] John Rvan, "What Exactly is Biblical Hospitality?" Doctrine and Devotion, https://www.doctrineanddevotion.com/blog/what-exactly-is-biblical-hospitality.

[5] John Rvan, "What Exactly is Biblical Hospitality?" Doctrine and Devotion, https://www.doctrineanddevotion.com/blog/what-exactly-is-biblical-hospitality.

Matthew 20:28 where it has an altered approach at the beginning to the narrative."[6] Like the other synoptic Gospels, the author remains anonymous, not specifying in its content who wrote the gospel, where, or the timeframe in which it was written. Scholars agree that "the composition of the combined work of Luke dated around 80-90 AD, while others estimate around 90-110 AD."[7] Although the exact time when Luke was written is not certain, R. Alan Culpepper suggests that Luke was a traveling companion of Paul, establishing a connection to the Acts of the Apostles. Culpepper further indicates, "according to early traditions that can be traced back to the second century, Luke, the physician and companion of Paul, wrote both Luke and Acts."[8]

Although there is not much information regarding Luke, there is some biblical references such as in Philemon chapter twenty-four, which states that Luke was a "fellow worker" of Paul; Colossians 4:14, which names Luke among Paul's travel companions and identifies him as "the beloved physician;" 2 Timothy 4:11 reports Luke as one of Paul's associates in his final imprisonment saying, "Only Luke is with me."[9]

If Luke is presumably the writer of the Gospel, and given the evidence of the relationship between Luke and Paul found in additional biblical accounts, we can estimate when Luke's Gospel was written. It can also be deduced that Luke authored the narrative and the Acts of the Apostles when considering his close relationship with Paul. According to Culpepper, "the are other early references to substantiate the Lukan

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[6] John Nolland, *Luke 2, 9:21-18:34* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 748.

[7] James H. Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2008), 42.

[8] R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 4.

[9] Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 4.

authorship in the ancient prologues written by church fathers like Irenaeus and Tertullian. Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon and defender of the fourfold Gospel, wrote against heresies, writes: "Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him."[10] Culpepper further notes that:

> In his treaties, Tertullian speaks against Marcion's rejection of the other three gospels and calling Luke's gospel an abridged version of the other Gospel. Tertullian then speaks to the authority and creditability of Luke's Gospel by stating it "has stood its ground from its very first publication….for even Luke's form of the Gospel men usually ascribe to Paul" and "Luke's also come down to us in like integrity as the other Gospels."[11]

A. C. Sundberg, in his book entitled *Canon Muratori: A Fourth Century List,* records that *"*The Muratorian Canon, which is suggested to have come from Rome, has been argued to be a fourth century manuscript, gives introduction to Luke that did not come from the New Testament."[12]

Wilhelm Schneemelcher gives this account of Luke in *New Testament Apocrypha*:

> The third Gospel book, that according to Luke. This physician Luke after Christ's ascension (resurrection?), since Paul had taken him with him as an expert in the way (of the teaching), composed it in his own name according to (his) thinking. Yet neither did he himself see the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain it, so he begins to tell the story from the birth of John."[13]

Regarding documentation of the *Oldest Gospel Prologues*, believed to contain additional biographical information on Luke, R. G. Heard notes that "this prologue to Luke dates to the third century and that the first part of the prologue incorporates, if not

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[10] Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 5.

[11] Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 6.

[12] A.C. Sundberg, *Canon Muratori: A Fourth Century List* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976), 609-610.

[13] Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 1:34.

an earlier and purely biological prologue, at least earlier and very valuable biological data."[14] According to Heard, "The beginning of what is called the *Oldest Gospel Prologue* to Luke reads as follows: Luke is a Syrian of Antioch, a doctor by profession, who is a disciple of apostles, and later followed Paul until his martyrdom. He served the Lord, without distraction, unmarried, childless, and fell asleep at the age of 84 in Boetia, full of the Holy Spirit."[15]

In David. E. Garland's *Literary Context,* he explains how chapter thirteen's two questions, "What is the reign of God like?" (13:18, 20), and "Are those who are saved few in number?" prepare us for answers to what is stated in chapter fourteen.[16] Garland states:

> The first question prompted Jesus' comparison of the reign of God to a mustard tree, where birds of the air nest in the branches, and to leaven, whose small amount is hidden in the lump of dough but produces irrefutable effects (13:18-21)," and it is "these subversive images that challenge expectations and they prepare us for the radical picture of the eschatological banquet that Jesus gives later in chapter 14……God's kingdom banquet will include those the upper crust would never consider inviting: the poor, the cripples, the blind and the lame.[17]

John Nolland makes the point that "there is a close connection between chapters 13 and 14 in that it parallels in structure and in wise advice to guest at the banquets that becomes a parable about life in the kingdom of God."[18] In regard to the Gospels, there are not any parallels that resemble this present pericope. As Nolland states, that "it is unclear

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[14] R. G. Heard, "The Old Gospel Prologues," *The Journal of Theological Studies* VI, no. 1 (1955): 11.

[15] Heard, *The Old Gospel Prologues*, 11.

[16] David E. Garland, *Luke, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022), 572.

[17] Garland, *Luke, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament,* 572.

[18] Nolland, *Luke 2, 9:21-18:34,* 748.

what traditional base Luke has for it. On the other hand, the material is marked by Lukan diction and has been influenced in syntax and wording, by vv8, 16 and 21. On the other hand, the content of the teaching and the radical form it takes align closely with the historical Jesus."[19]

Joel B. Green, in *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament,* points out how verses seven through eleven and twelve through fourteen are similar in structure as the "two topics are addressed in similar structure and heading of recasting etiquette."[20] Although Luke states in chapter 14:7, identifying Jesus speaking: "Now He told a parable to those who were invited," there is much debate as to whether it is truly considered a parable. Garland says to this point that:

> The passage is quite unparabolic compared to other parables in the Gospel and resembles more of warning coughed as a sage advice with a wisdom saying and a beatitude. The two warnings in 14:8-10 follow a similar pattern with an indefinite temporal clause, prohibition, reason, definite temporal clause and positive command, reason, and general principle supporting reasons, and they are all bound together by the verb "to invite."[21]

Nolland asserts that "according to Luke's narrative, the term "parable" can be seen as a designation used by Luke upon initial examination, but the passage also appears to offer practical counsel concerning the observance of social gatherings."[22] Also, in agreement is Rudolph K. Bultmann, in his writing entitled *History of the Synoptic Tradition* as he explains that if this passage is to be regarded as a parable, it would not be in the usual sense, when it is reviewed stylistically to "similitudes or parables it is only

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[19] Nolland, *Luke 2, 9:21-18:34,* 751.

[20] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 549.

[21] Garland, *Luke, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 573.

[22] Nolland, *Luke 2, 9:21-18:34,* 748.

faint, and that in reality it resembles more warnings."[23] Bultmann further points out that verse eleven is "rightly regarded as a wisdom-saying of Jesus added to the rest."[24]

Contrary to this position of being a "wisdom saying," John M. Creed in *The Gospel According to St. Luke* suggests that the passage is properly identified and introduced as a parable due to the fact that "it is not a direct injunction as to proper behavior at a dinner, but the proper behavior at a feast affords an analogy to the attitude demanded by the kingdom of God."[25] Regardless as to how the passage is introduced, it is suggested by Joseph A. Fitzmyer in *Sayings on Conduct at Dinners (14:7–14) in The Gospel According to Luke (X–XXIV)* that this passage as recorded should be "regarded form critically as hortatory."[26]

Thus far, we have investigated the authorship and estimated time the narrative was written and have concluded through the testimony of the church fathers and other scholars, which stands in agreement, arguably, that late in the second to the third century, Luke wrote the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. In writing the Gospel narrative, Luke clearly states the book's intended purpose. The Gospel opens by stating:

> Many people have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us. Just as they were handed down to us by eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Lk. 1:1-4, NIV).

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[23] Rudolph K. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1968), 179.

[24] Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 103.

[25] John M. Creed, *The Gospel According to Luke* (New York, NY: McMillan Publishers, 1930), 98.

[26] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Sayings on Conduct at Dinners (14:7–14)," in *The Gospel According to Luke (X–XXIV): Introduction, Translation, and Notes by, 1043–1048* (New Haven, CT: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1985), http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780300261653.ch-097.

Like the other Gospel writers, Luke's Gospel took what was either experienced or, in Luke's case, what was investigated and presented a chronological framework of the life and ministry of Jesus from his unique perspective. One of the prevalent themes in Luke's Gospel is Jesus' teaching on humility as its threaded in this selected text.[27] Darrell L. Bock in the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament,* states that this passage is "in the Greco-Roman symposium tradition, and that the Lucan themes of humanity versus pride and concern for the poor as well as the Jewish wisdom themes stand behind the text."[28] Lucan's Jesus is conveyed to the reader as concerned about social justice, compassionate and caring toward the poor and marginalized; and is a friend to the outcast. Luke's Gospel is presented with an emphasis on inclusivity and universality of salvation to the broader audience, which includes Gentiles.

Luke's Gospel develops Jesus' relevance and connection to Israel's history, the scriptures, and the revelation of God's redemption for those who are lost and in sin, both Jews and Gentiles. The Gospel speaks to the inclusion of everyone in recording Christ's declaration: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10).

Jesus illustrates this declaration later in chapter nineteen when He meets a Jewish tax collector named Zacchaeus in Jericho, who collects taxes for Rome. Zacchaeus had accumulated great wealth both as a legitimate tax collector and through illegitimate means. After hearing that Jesus was entering town nearby, he climbed a tree because he was short in stature, hoping to catch a glimpse of Jesus. Upon seeing Zacchaeus, Jesus

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[27] Darrell L. Bock, "Luke: 2 Volumes," *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), ProQuest Ebook Central.

[28] Bock, "Luke," ProQuest Ebook Central.

urged him to hurry and come down, stating that He needed to stay at his house that very day. Jesus then shared a meal with him, much to the religious leaders' disappointment, as they made a point to say “he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner" (Lk. 19:7 ESV). Through Jesus sharing a meal with someone so unlikely, Zacchaeus received salvation.

Green, in his commentary on *The Gospel of Luke,* points out the importance of a meal shared in ancient Mediterranean practices and how it served as a “delicate barometer” of social relations. Jesus in Luke’s Gospel challenges conventional mealtime practices relating to the invitation and seating arrangements by doing more than offering wisdom or advice but instead upends “the socially constructed reality and replaced with what must have been regarded as a scandalous alternative.”[29] According to Dennis Smith in *Table Fellowship as a literary Motif in Gospel of Luke,* “It is to be understood that the mealtime practices in Roman antiquity were paramount in how the social stratification were essential in the structuring of common life and the benefits that were associated with the elite. The positioning of one’s seat indicated one’s ranking relative to the other guest.”[30] Darrell L. Bock in *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* confirms this premise as follows: “The seating itself was designed in a “U” with the host in the center between the two wings, and based of social status, prestige and ranking would determine who would be seated next while the seat closest to the host was the next seat of honor.[31] This is how Green describes the social positioning of perceived honor:

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[29] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 550.

[30] Dennis Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in Gospel of Luke,” *JBL* 106, no. 4 (1987): 617.

[31] Darrell L. Bock, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 75.

> One's status is based upon social estimation of one's relative honor – that is, on the perception of those around a person regarding his prestige. For example, where one sat (was assigned or allowed to sit) at a meal the host was a public advertisement of one's status; as a consequence, the matter of seating arrangements was carefully attended and, in the agonistic society, one might presume to claim a more honorable seat with the hope that it (and the honor that went with it) might be granted. What is more, because meals were used to publicize and reinforce social hierarchy, invitations to meals were themselves carefully considered so as to allow to one's table only one's inner circle, or at least preserve one's social position.[32]

This mealtime etiquette is still practiced today. Unfortunately, it is not limited to social gatherings but also includes religious ones. Privilege is a practice that allows only those who can bring a benefit to the host. What determines inclusion is one's social status; thus, possessing a similar status, influence, or prestige will be the key factor in whether one can participate.

This practice is called "reciprocity," which was central to the ethics of the stability of the Roman Empire. According to Green this system was a "gift-and-obligation system that tied every person, from the emperor in Rome to the child in the most distance province, into an intricate web of social relations"[33] Green continues to assert that:

> Apart from certain relations within the family unit and discussions of ideal friendship, gifts, by unwritten definition, were never free, but were given and received with either explicit or implicit strings attached. Expectations of reciprocity were naturally extended to the table: To accept an invitation was to obligate oneself to extend a comparable one, a practice that circumscribed the list of those to who one might extend an invitation. The powerful and privileged would not ordinarily think to invite the poor to their meals, for this would (1) possibly endanger the social status of the host; (2) be a wasted invitation, since the self-interests of the elite could never be served by an invitation that could be reciprocated; and (3) ensue in embarrassment for the poor, who could not

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[32] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 550.

[33] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 550.

> reciprocate and, therefore, would be required by social protocols to decline the invitation.[34]

Moralia Plutarch shows in a remark that he made in his *Table Talk* (1.2) the importance of aligning with the social protocol in Greco-Roman society:

> My brother Timon, upon an occasion when he was host to a considerable number of guests, bade them each as they entered take whatever place they wished and there recline, for among those who had been invited were foreigners as well as citizens, friends as well as kinsman, and in a word, all sorts of people. Now when many guests were already assembled, a foreigner came up to the door of the banquet room, like a grandee out of a comedy, rather absurd with extravagant clothes and a train of servants; and when he had run his eyes round the guest who had settled in their places, he refused to enter, but withdrew and was on his way out when a number of the guests ran to fetch him back, but he said that he saw no place left worthy of him. Plutarch's father said, "if he had arranged the placement of his guest in the beginning as I told him to do, we would not be under suspicion of disorderliness.[35]

In Greco-Roman society we can see that there was a balanced reciprocity system in place that "regarded hospitality as utilitarian investment, designed to return a net gain in status, honor, and influence."[36] In gaining an understanding as to the social stratification of the elite in Roman antiquity regarding seating, we will get an understanding of the further importance of the meal itself. The meal was very important because of what the meal symbolized. Jeremy Sweets notes in an article entitled:

> Meals in Luke's Gospel" on Wordpress.com that "One of the distinctive elements of Luke's gospel is the emphasis upon the table. The table is one of the most common elements in the gospel of Luke. It progresses the narrative along, and it provides the setting for major teaching moments in the gospel. On at least eight

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[34] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 550.

[35] Moralia Plutarch, "Table Talk," Loeb Classics, https://loebclassics.com/view/plutarch-morilia_table_talk/1961/pb_LCL425.3.xml.

[36] Gabriel Herman, *Ritualized Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Press 1987), 121-123.

> occasions, Jesus can be seen sitting down to meals with others. In two additional accounts, a meal seems to be implied."[37]

Sweets highlights these accounts recorded by Luke:

> 5:27-32 Banquet at Levi's House (with tax collectors and sinners)
> 7:36-50 Dinner at Simon's House (with pharisees, guests, and sinful woman)
> 9:10-17 Feeding the 5,000 (with disciples and crowds)
> 10:38-42 Hospitality at the home of Mary and Martha (with Mary and Martha)
> 11:37-52 Dinner at Pharisee's House (with pharisees and lawyers)
> 14:1-24 Sabbath Meal at Pharisee's House (with pharisees, lawyers, and guests)
> 19:1-10 Hospitality at home of Zacchaeus (with Zacchaeus)
> 22:14-38 The Last Supper (with the Apostles)
> 24:28-32 Breaking Bread at Emmaus (with two disciples)
> 24:36-43 Jesus Eats Meal in Presence of Disciples (with two disciples).[38]

Jesus, aware of the social hierarchy of the time, notices that many of the invited guests ambitiously sought high-ranking seating. Luke records Jesus sharing a parable, which some view as wise advice, concerning the precepts of mealtime etiquette, while also addressing eschatological truths. In verses one through six, Jesus engages with the lawyers and Pharisees, instructing them on the importance of showing compassion even on the Sabbath, as he healed a man suffering from what the Bible calls dropsy. Now, at the banquet, Jesus turns to the invitees to confront pride and challenge the established world system regarding the socially elite. The invited guests, including the Pharisees, are depicted as individuals who "exploit hospitality for self-serving agendas, and whose patterns of hospitality both secure their positions of dominance in their communities and

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[37] Jeremy Sweets, "Meals in Luke's Gospel," Theological Sweets, https://theologicalsweets.wordpress.com/2011/07/24/meals-in-lukes-gospel/.

[38] Jeremy Sweets, "Meals in Luke's Gospel," Theological Sweets, https://theologicalsweets.wordpress.com/2011/07/24/meals-in-lukes-gospel/.

insulate them from the needy"[39] according to Halvor Moxnes in *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel.*

In this passage, although honor is socially determined, Jesus advises those invited to refrain from seeking positions of honor, particularly if the seat one claims rightfully belongs to someone ranked higher, which can cause public humiliation. Jesus recommends always taking the lowest seat and waiting to be asked to move upward. This is wise counsel, but some commentators take issue with this instruction, as it could be viewed as a motive-driven tactic for gaining the seat of honor. Bock states that:

> The main point is that it is better for others to recognize who you are than to suggest to them your proper (or improper) place. Humility is the best course in all affairs. Stations should be suggested by others, not seized by oneself… Prudence and wisdom suggest that one not be anxious to take the honored seat gives the qualifying reason for not taking the first seat.[40]

Howard Marshall in *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* speaks on places of honor, indicating that Jesus:

> Recommends guests at a meal not to take the highest places and run the risk of being humiliated by being asked to move down the table, but to take a low place and enjoy the glory of being asked to take the higher place…This as confirmed by the conclusion in vs.11 which speaks of the humiliation and the exaltation of men by God.[41]

Therefore, we understand that Jesus' exhortation at the banquet or wedding feast is not to assume the self-assertive position of honor but to recognize that the position is determined at the discretion of the host. Likewise, in the kingdom of God, our entry is not predicated on man's opinion of oneself but on God's righteousness and judgment.

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[39] Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 552.

[40]Bock, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke,* 1263.

[41] Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishers, 1978), 581.

Green insists that:

> Not only does Jesus suggest not assuming places of honor but He also speaks on the criteria in which the guests are invited, challenging the social norm of inviting friends, family or wealthy neighbors with expectation of reciprocity, although it should not be understood that Jesus is forbidding inviting one's family, friends, and neighbors to meals (15:3-7, 8-10; Acts 10:24) but forbids inviting them exclusively.[42]

According to Green, Jesus is challenging the "ethics of patronage and the regulation of social affiliations according to the demands of reciprocity."[43] Green goes on to assert that "Jesus' "counterproposal" to the host would be to cease from "tendencies of exclusionary social boundaries and the values of reciprocity" and move toward a system of inclusivity."[44] This type of anthropological model of exchange, according to Green, would:

> Characterize by *generalized reciprocity,* that the giving of gifts would be simply an extension of hospitality, without expectation of return. Persons treated as outsiders, strangers, would be embraced as members of one's extended kin group. Insofar as Jesus' host and table companions are comprised of the socially elite, his message to them would entail a form of unpremeditated generosity involving redistribution on behalf of the poor.[45]

Moxnes suggests that "the behaviors Jesus demands would collapse the distance between rich and poor, insider and outsider; reverting to anthropological models of economic exchange."[46] Bock states, in regard to this process of reciprocity, that:

> We have the tendency to be hospitable only to one's own friends and relatives. But Jesus exhorts the leaders to open their table fellowship to all, especially those in need who cannot pay back the favor. Jesus opens up the community of the relationship so that no boundaries of class or rank exist. To invite those who

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[42] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 553.

[43] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 553.

[44] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 553.

[45] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 553.

[46] Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, 131.

> cannot repay is not the cultural norm. Though a return invitation from them is not possible, there awaits a different, better reward: God will repay with blessing in the resurrection.[47]

Marshall notes that "Jesus says to not invite the ones you habitually call that can repay the invite but invite the less fortunate the 'poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed'" (Lk. 14:13). It was Jesus' aim to cancel the social strata of that day but illustrating the importance of showing compassion to the ones that are the unexpected the "incomplete and impure."[48] Marshall states that Jesus' parable:

> Eliminates the issues of power and status that the giving of gifts generated by introducing God into the equation. The assumption is that the bond between people in this case the have and the have nots is triangular. Repayment would come from God at the resurrection, not from the recipients of any benevolence. This teaching eviscerates the traditional patron-client relationship that governed society throughout the ancient world.[49]

Conclusion

The prospect of showing genuine, unselfish hospitality to engage our surrounding community is indeed refreshing and achievable with an intentional plan. I agree with Pastor George Hendricks, who wrote in an article in godsverse.com on "Calling Post: How Churches Can Reach Out to Their Communities" that:

> Community outreach is not just a choice but also a responsibility for churches. It allows them to fulfill their mission of spreading God's love and compassion to all. By actively engaging with their communities, churches can demonstrate their commitment to serving others and promoting a sense of unity and belonging. Community outreach also helps churches to break down any preconceived

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[47] Bock, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 1266.

[48] Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* 578.

[49] Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 579.

barriers or misconceptions that people may have about religion, fostering an environment of understanding and acceptance.[50]

I also agree with writer George Ross, who asserts that "Biblical hospitality transcends cultural norms with a tangible picture of the gospel."[51] Ross presents four ways to lead our churches in this practice as we draw nearer to the saints and strangers in our midst:

1. Teach on biblical hospitality - Although Scripture was filled with examples of hospitality in both the Old and New Testaments, there was a disconnect in the twenty-first-century North American church. In large, the understanding and practice of biblical hospitality was a foreign concept and idea within the local church. In the Old Testament, hospitality is seen as an attribute of God, and we repeatedly see its images in the biblical proclamation of the relationship between God and His people. Specifically, hospitality is seen in God calling out Israel to be His people and welcoming them into a covenant relationship with Himself. In the New Testament, hospitality played a significant role in the public ministry of Jesus, was seen as a moral imperative and ethic of the early church, and was the primary catalytic force in the advance of the gospel.

2. Define biblical hospitality - The practice of hospitality towards believers is not a justification to neglect those who are strangers and far from God; hospitality should be defined and practiced as a reflection of God's missionary nature of bringing foreigners and strangers into His covenant community. But for clarity in definitions, the relationship between the church and hospitality is critical for a working definition of biblical hospitality that was practiced to both saints and strangers in the New Testament. Thus, a working definition shaped by Scripture and history would instead be this: Hospitality is taking the initiative to help saints and strangers go from unknown to known by opening up our homes and lives for the sake of the gospel and the glory of God.

3. Model biblical hospitality - In Titus 1:8 and 1 Timothy 3:2, hospitality is a qualification of a pastor or elder in a local church: "An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach" (1 Tm. 3:2); "but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled" (Ti. 1:8). Paul encourages believers when identifying pastor leaders in the church, stating that they must give evidence of hospitality to be considered qualified.

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[50] George Hendricks, "Calling Post: How Churches Can Reach Out to Their Communities," God's Verse, https://godsverse.com/calling-post-how-churches-can-reach-out-to-their-communities/.

[51] George Ross, "Four Ways to Equip Your Church in Biblical Hospitality," New Churches, https://www.newchurches.com/resource/4-ways-to-equip-your-church-in-biblical-hospitality/.

Hospitality had an enormous impact on shaping practices and establishing leaders in the early church. Considering the weight of hospitality in Scripture and that hospitality was a qualification of a pastor or elder, should we not give more attention to practicing and modeling hospitality as leaders in the church?

4. Challenge your church to practice biblical hospitality - In the New Testament, we overlook the most obvious methods of evangelism and discipleship: the practice of biblical hospitality. The ministry of Jesus and ministry of the early church flourished through hospitality. Evangelism and disciple-making in the early church revolved around the practice of hospitality. From church formation to gospel advance, biblical hospitality was at the center of what transpired in the early church. Believing and practicing hospitality that takes the initiative to help saints and strangers go from unknown to known by opening up our homes and lives for the sake of the gospel and the glory of God is one of the most gospel-centered, countercultural witnesses we can have. What would our churches look like if, instead of planning a year full of programs, events, and meetings, we strategically made time to challenge and lead our church family to practice biblical hospitality?[52]

This approach is biblical and will be demonstrated in this project. Developing a biblical hospitality model to equip church leaders for engaging the surrounding community will significantly enhance Gethsemane Baptist Church's ability to show hospitality and welcome newcomers. This model can also be replicated in other churches to reimagine, revitalize, and reconnect with their surrounding communities.

[52] George Ross, “Four Ways to Equip Your Church in Biblical Hospitality,” New Churches, https://www.newchurches.com/resource/4-ways-to-equip-your-church-in-biblical-hospitality/.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

While many long-established rural churches have adapted in terms of membership and fellowship, remaining appealing to newcomers because of their small-town charm, there has not been a deliberate effort to demonstrate biblical hospitality to bridge the gap between the church and the community. Many newcomers from diverse cultures now reside in the community of churches, which currently lacks a system to effectively welcome them and connect them with the church. Consequently, people in the surrounding community are not being engaged in ministry, underscoring the issue of churches not growing or making disciples of Jesus Christ. A proposed solution to this challenge, as outlined in this project, is to develop a biblical hospitality model designed to equip church leaders for engaging with the surrounding community. An effective model would aim to achieve the following goals: 1) Increase a spirit of humility in serving; 2) Illuminate the importance of being hospitable to others, regardless of economic, racial, and social differences; 3) Enhance engagement with the surrounding community; and 4) Make disciples for Jesus Christ.

Hospitality involves creating an environment where individuals feel valued, cared for, and respected, whether in a home, business, community, or church. Hospitality encompasses gestures of kindness and care for others, which include offering food,

shelter, assistance, safety, and medical care. Regardless of the venue or event, hospitality means serving the guest and ensuring they are welcomed and supported. An article titled "The Art of Hospitality: How to Welcome Guests from Different Cultures" on popandthistle.com supports this premise:

> The art of hospitality is about more than just providing a service. It is about creating an experience, an experience that is personalized, enriching, and memorable. It is about making guests feel welcome, comfortable, and cared for, regardless of their cultural background. In the words of Maya Angelou, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.[1]

Ultimately, hospitality is about fostering a sense of belonging and ensuring that others feel included and comfortable. It should not be taken for granted that serving guests from diverse cultures with a spirit of hospitality comes naturally to everyone, even within the church. Therefore, training is essential, as noted in this *popandthistle.com* excerpt:

> Training and education are crucial in preparing hospitality professionals to effectively welcome guests from different cultures. Such training should focus on developing cultural sensitivity, understanding, and awareness. It should provide practical tips and strategies on how to understand and respect the customs, traditions, and norms of different cultures. It should also provide guidance on how to communicate effectively with guests from different cultures.[2]

In a bing.com Sevenrooms video on "What is Hospitality?," Danny Meyer, CEO of Union Square Hospitality Group, states "Hospitality is present when something

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[1] Pop and Thistle, "The Art of Hospitality: How to Welcome Guests from Different Cultures," Pop and Thistle, https://popandthistle.com/the-art-of-hospitality-how-to-welcome-guests-from-different-cultures/.

[2] Pop and Thistle, "The Art of Hospitality: How to Welcome Guests from Different Cultures," Pop and Thistle, https://popandthistle.com/the-art-of-hospitality-how-to-welcome-guests-from-different-cultures/.

happens *for you*. It is absent when something happens *to you*."[3] Martijn Barten, in his article entitled "Hospitality Definition: Clear Explanation of the Concept of Hospitality" on revfine.com states that "hospitality refers to the friendly and generous reception of guests or strangers."[4] Barten continues with these takeaways:

> Guest-Centric Service prioritizes the comfort and satisfaction of guests through personalized and attentive care. Cultural Exchange facilitates interaction between diverse cultures, promoting understanding and respect among different communities. Hospitality describes a positive relationship between the host, acting with goodwill, and the guest, who most commonly seeks food, shelter, safety and/or entertainment[5]

By equipping church leaders to engage with the surrounding community, Gethsemane Baptist Church aims to connect with various cultures and make additional disciples of Jesus Christ. Christie P. Moon defines cross-cultural discipleship in an article on crossculturaldiscipleship.com as follows: "Cross-cultural discipleship is helping someone from a different cultural background to grow as a follower of Christ. When you disciple others, it's helpful to learn more about their home country, native language, and cultural background. Their experiences and worldview affect their developmental needs."[6]

From a historical perspective, the biblical hospitality approach to equipping church leaders for engaging with the surrounding community can be traced back to the

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[3] Danny Myer, "What is Hospitality?" Bing, https://www.bing.com/Sevenrooms+what+is+Hospitality+Danny+Myer+CEO+of+Union+Square+Hospitality+group/.

[4] Martijn Barten, "Hospitality Definition: Clear Explanation of the Concept of Hospitality," RevFine, https://www.revfine.com/hospitality-definition/.

[5] Martijn Barten, "Hospitality Definition: Clear Explanation of the Concept of Hospitality," RevFine, https://www.revfine.com/hospitality-definition/.

[6] Christie P. Moon, "What is Cross-Cultural Discipleship?" RevFine, https://crossculturaldiscipleship.com/about-ccd/.

practice of serving others and the cross-cultural discipleship exemplified by Jean-Henri Dunant, a Swiss businessman known for his role as a social activist and humanitarian visionary. He is also renowned for founding the Red Cross and is regarded as a pioneer of the modern concepts of hospitality and humanitarianism. His life and work embody the power of compassion, empathy, and action in alleviating human suffering. Furthermore, his life illustrates the principles of cross-cultural discipleship through his Christian beliefs and his readiness to share and demonstrate through action.

While hospitality is often perceived through the lens of the hotel and restaurant industries, Jean-Henri Dunant illustrates it as the act of serving others in need, regardless of race or culture. In her article titled "How Can I Practice Christian Hospitality?" on ligonier.org, Rebecca VanDoodewaard states, "This kind of hospitality can be seen as biblical hospitality, which is not about entertaining but is motivated by different motives, means, and ends because it isn't about the one who is serving or the who is the host. Hospitality as instructed in the biblical text is about honoring God by obeying His command to contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show Hospitality (Rm. 12:13)."[7]

This historical perspective is thus explored in this presentation of Jean-Henri Dunant's life, religious impact, cross-cultural discipleship, business ventures, the Red Cross, and honors. This historical foundation concludes with a discussion of the correlation between Jean-Henri Dunant's compassion as a businessman and the biblical hospitality approach to equipping church leaders to engage the surrounding community.

[7] Rebecca VanDoodewaard, "How Can I Practice Christian Hospitality?" Ligonier, https://www.ligonier.org/learn/teachers/rebecca-vandoodewaard.

The Life of Jean-Henri Dunant

Jean-Henri Dunant, the second of five children, was born on May 8, 1828, in Geneva, Switzerland, to a devout Calvinist family. His father, Jean-Jacques Dunant, was a successful businessman, and his mother, Antoinette Dunant-Colladon, was deeply involved in charitable work and social equity. Growing up in Geneva, Dunant's parents instilled in him a strong sense of moral duty and compassion for the poor and disenfranchised. Dan Graves, in his article for *Christianity.com* titled "Christian Businessman Founded the Red Cross," notes that:

> Henri Dunant had been reared in active Christian faith. His father was involved in social work and Dunant himself had labored for the Swiss arm of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). He was a man of action. Appalled by the suffering he witnessed at Solferino, he immediately organized the local peasants to gather the wounded and care for them in homes and churches.[8]

Dunant's involvement in charitable organizations like the Geneva Society of Almsgiving and the Thursday Association further solidified his commitment to compassion and care for others.

The Geneva Society of Almsgiving was a charitable organization founded on the principles of Christian charity and social responsibility. The Society's mission provided assistance and support to those in need within the local community. Like many charitable organizations, it emerged in the nineteenth century in response to growing social and economic challenges. Its primary focus was to offer financial aid, food, clothing, and other essentials to the impoverished and marginalized. Dunant's strong family upbringing

[8] Dan Graves, "Christian Businessman Founded the Red Cross," Christianity, https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timelines/1801-1900/christian-businessman-founded-the-red-cross/.

instilled in him a deep appreciation for service to others, significantly influenced by his mother's charitable activities.[9]

Dunant demonstrated a strong aptitude for business and entrepreneurship by working in his family's enterprises, which primarily engaged in grain, milling, and the sale of grain products. Additionally, he was involved in trading activities, both importing and exporting goods, due to the economic environment of Geneva, a significant commercial hub during the nineteenth century. Dunant pursued his own business ventures, including a successful career in banking and finance. Despite his professional success, Dunant remained dedicated to social justice and philanthropy. Influenced by his mother and early experiences, he valued service to others, which laid the foundation for his commitment to alleviating human suffering and promoting the principles of compassion, solidarity, and hospitality that would define his life's work.[10]

Religious Impact

Jean-Henri Dunant was influenced by the Calvinist tradition, which emphasized charity, service, and moral responsibility within the Christian faith. These principles shaped Dunant's early experiences of volunteering and caring for those less fortunate, instilling a profound sense of empathy and compassion in him. Furthermore, his beliefs contributed to his vision of universal compassion, promoting the idea of treating all individuals with dignity and respect. His commitment to helping those in need was

[9] Nobel Prize, *Henry Dunant-Biographical*, Nobel Prize Outreach, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1901/dunant/biographical/.

[10] Nobel Prize, *Henry Dunant-Biographical*, Nobel Prize Outreach, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1901/dunant/biographical/.

paramount, regardless of background, belief system, or political or religious affiliation, and it reflected the core tenets of Christian charity and love for one's neighbor.[11]

Dunant's upbringing and religious influence also shaped his ethical framework and sense of justice, motivating him to advocate for the hospitable, humane treatment of wounded soldiers and civilians during wartime. He believed in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being, which resonated with the Christian principles of the sanctity of life and the call to alleviate suffering wherever it existed.

As confirmed by Jean-Henri Dunant, reading, understanding, and living out the hospitality principles of the Bible are key to equipping church leaders to engage and serve the surrounding community. In his icrc.org blog "The Religious Convictions of Henri Dunant," Cédric Cotter notes that "The young Dunant was deeply influenced by several local clergymen and the main principles of the Awakening faith: reading of the Bible, millennialism, proselytism and active charity – a good Christian had to be committed to charitable activities. This environment played a prominent role in forging his faith and charitable commitment."[12]

Cross-Cultural Discipleship

Jean-Henri Dunant was committed to discipleship and sharing the principles of faith, and his actions embodied the essence of true discipleship. He mentored and collaborated with people of various backgrounds to further his work of compassionate

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[11] Cédric Cotter, "The Religious Convictions of Henri Dunant," ICRC, https://blogs.icrc.org/religion-humanitarianprinciples/the-religious-convictions-of-henri-dunant-founder-of-the-icrc/.

[12] Cédric Cotter, "The Religious Convictions of Henri Dunant," ICRC, https://blogs.icrc.org/religion-humanitarianprinciples/the-religious-convictions-of-henri-dunant-founder-of-the-icrc/.

service through a global lens. Dunant fostered an environment where people of diverse cultures could work together towards a common goal of compassionate service to everyone, all while sharing the principles of his faith.[13]

An example of Dunant exemplifying discipleship and commitment to his faith is the founding of the Thursday Association, established with a few close friends. The Thursday Association was formed in the spirit of charity and social responsibility, aimed at addressing the needs of the impoverished and marginalized in society through acts of benevolence and community service. The Association's primary activities included sharing biblical principles through Bible study, aiding the poor, and engaging in social outreach initiatives. Members met regularly on Thursdays to study scripture, discuss matters of faith, and pray together. In addition to their spiritual pursuits, they organized practical ways to meet the needs of those in the surrounding area, including distributing food, clothing, and offering financial assistance.[14]

The Thursday Association's initiatives promoted societal reform, including visiting prisons and advocating for improved conditions for inmates. Dunant's establishment of the Thursday Association highlighted his dedication to serving others, sharing the principles of his Christian faith, and advancing the principles of compassion and social justice.[15]

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[13] Cédric Cotter, "The Religious Convictions of Henri Dunant," ICRC, https://blogs.icrc.org/religion-humanitarianprinciples/the-religious-convictions-of-henri-dunant-founder-of-the-icrc/.

[14] Cédric Cotter, "The Religious Convictions of Henri Dunant," ICRC, https://blogs.icrc.org/religion-humanitarianprinciples/the-religious-convictions-of-henri-dunant-founder-of-the-icrc/.

[15] Nobel Prize, "Henry Dunant-Biographical," Nobel Prize Outreach, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1901/dunant/biographical/.

While his religious beliefs may not have been the sole influence on his hospitality and humanitarian efforts, they certainly provided a moral and spiritual foundation that inspired his compassionate actions and service to everyone. Furthermore, although Dunant's religious beliefs played a crucial role in shaping his approach to hospitality, his business pursuits also significantly impacted his life and contributed to his broader vision of service.[16]

Business Ventures

Jean-Henri Dunant's career in business began with his family's grain business in Geneva. Due to the prosperity of Dunant's family's milling and grain-selling ventures, as well as their involvement in various trading activities and the import and export of goods, he was introduced to the world of trade and commerce at a young age. This vibrant trading environment nurtured Dunant's entrepreneurial instincts and equipped him with a strong foundation in the business world.[17]

In 1853, Dunant embarked on a new business venture by founding the financial and commercial company Mons-Ge'mila Mills in Algeria. This venture aimed to develop agricultural and industrial projects in the French colony. Dunant selected Algeria for its fertile land, hoping to capitalize on it by planting and harvesting wheat and other crops. However, this venture faced numerous challenges, including a legal dispute over land rights and difficulties in securing sufficient water for irrigation. Although Dunant

[16] "Jean Henri Dunant," New World Encyclopedia, www.newworldencyclodia.org/p/index.php?title=Jean_Henri_Dunant&oldid=1011223.

[17] Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, "Saviors in History: Jean Henry Dunant," Aurora Prize, https://auroraprize.com/en/saviors-history-jean-henry-dunant.

encountered these setbacks in Algeria, they broadened his understanding of international trade and the complexities of conducting business in foreign markets. Through this experience, he also became aware of the harsh realities faced by colonized people, which further deepened his empathy and commitment to addressing the social needs of others.

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative gives this account of this business venture in an article "Saviors in History: Jean Henry Dunant"

> Along with his vibrant social life and philanthropic efforts, Dunant also strived to reach his full potential in business. He became the president of the Financial and Industrial Company of Mons-Gémila Mills in Algeria, where he was to exploit a large tract of land. To obtain water rights he decided to personally meet Emperor Napoleon III who was then leading the French and Italian armies that were driving the Austrians out of Italy. The trip to Solferino, Italy, would change Dunant's whole life.[18]

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative gives further insight on Dunant organizing the community to help injured soldiers:

> Arriving in Solferino on June 24, 1859, Dunant witnessed one of the bloodiest battles of the century. In its aftermath, devastated by the sufferings of thousands of wounded soldiers left on the battlefield, he organized the locals, especially women and girls, to help injured soldiers from both sides. They acted under the slogan "tutti fratelli" ("all are brothers"), coined by the local women. Dunant believed women would play a decisive role in the future of mankind – a potential that should be unleashed for humankind's sake. "The influence of women is an essential factor in the welfare of humanity, and it will become more valuable as time proceeds," he later wrote.[19]

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[18] Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, "Saviors in History: Jean Henry Dunant," Aurora Prize, https://auroraprize.com/en/saviors-history-jean-henry-dunant/.

[19] Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, "Saviors in History: Jean Henry Dunant," Aurora Prize, https://auroraprize.com/en/saviors-history-jean-henry-dunant/.

The Red Cross

History revealed that biblical hospitality is usually started by a compassionate person, an idea, a movement, or a program. This has been exemplified by Jean-Henri Dunant, recognized for founding the Red Cross. Stephen Kosner in his article "Humanitarian for all: The Life of Henry Dunant" in the *Hektoen International, A Journal of Medical Humanities*, gives this account of Dunant's role in the establishment of the Red Cross: "In 1863, having read Dunant's book, Gustave Moynier, the president of the Public Welfare Association of Geneva, contacted Dunant about putting his humanitarian relief program into action. They created a five-person committee that organized a four-day conference held in Geneva."[20] Kosner specifies how "delegates from sixteen nations attended the International Conference, and on October 29 they passed ten resolutions and three wishes. The resolutions called for establishing medical relief societies, holding additional conferences, and creating the symbol for all medical personnel to wear: a red cross on a white background, the inverse of the Swiss flag."[21]

According to Kosner, "the wishes reflected Dunant's desire for all medical personnel to be considered neutral in war. With the passing of the resolutions and wishes on October 29, the Red Cross was born. The official name International Committee for Relief of Wounded Soldiers was changed in 1876 to the International Committee of the

[20] Stephen Kosner, "Humanitarian for all: The Life of Henry Dunant," Hektoen International, A Journal of Medical Humanities, https://hekint.org/2020/01/29/humanitarian-for-all-the-life-of-henry-dunant/.

[21] Stephen Kosner, "Humanitarian for all: The Life of Henry Dunant," Hektoen International, A Journal of Medical Humanities, https://hekint.org/2020/01/29/humanitarian-for-all-the-life-of-henry-dunant/.

Red Cross."[22] Kosner notes that "today the International Committee for the Red Cross has 18,000 staff in over ninety countries and is the largest humanitarian organization in the world."[23]

The *International Committee of the Red Cross* proudly publishes and recognizes Dunant as its founder on icrc.org, highlighting his ability to engage the community in providing compassionate care for all people in the spirit of biblical hospitality.

> On 24 June 1859, the future founder of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Henry Dunant, got the shock of his life. He arrived in Solferino, a town in northern Italy, to discover the French and Austrian armies had just fought one of the bloodiest battles on European soil since the Battle of Waterloo. In the ditches, fields and valleys around the town, 40,000 soldiers lay wounded or dead, abandoned to their fate. Dunant was revolted by what he saw. What he was about to do would change the course of humanitarianism profoundly. Still today, 160 years on, his ideas remain as powerful as ever, giving millions of men and women around the world the means to prevent and alleviate human suffering.[24]

The *International Committee of the Red Cross* expounds on Dunant's profession, character, initial intentions, and subsequent humanitarian actions:

> Dunant was a Genevan entrepreneur and had gone to Solferino purely for business reasons. But faced with the horrors of the battlefield, he began organizing first aid for the wounded with the help of the local population. He dressed wounds, gave water to thirsty soldiers, paid for sheets and food out of his own pocket and recorded the last words of the dying so they could be sent to their families. He also asked the victorious French forces to release Austrian surgeons they had captured so they could treat wounded soldiers from both sides. This humanitarian spirit was out of the ordinary: at the time armies had more veterinarians in their

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[22] Stephen Kosner, "Humanitarian for all: The Life of Henry Dunant," Hektoen International, A Journal of Medical Humanities, https://hekint.org/2020/01/29/humanitarian-for-all-the-life-of-henry-dunant/.

[23] Stephen Kosner, "Humanitarian for all: The Life of Henry Dunant," Hektoen International, A Journal of Medical Humanities, https://hekint.org/2020/01/29/humanitarian-for-all-the-life-of-henry-dunant/.

[24] International Committee of the Red Cross, "160 Years on the Side of Humanity: A Commitment that has Never Waned," ICRC, https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/history/160-years-humanity/.

> ranks than surgeons. A horse was worth more than a soldier. And an army's medics were as much of a military target as any other.[25]

Similar to the influence of effective church leaders employing a biblical hospitality approach to connect with the local community, Dunant's call to action swiftly transitioned from personal to communal, as reflected in icrc.org:

When Dunant got back to his hometown of Geneva, he began writing A Memory of Solferino, which was published in 1862. In his book, he set out two major ideas:

- Relief committees should be formed to train volunteers in times of peace so that they could treat the wounded in times of war. These committees swiftly became the first National Red Cross Societies.

- An international agreement should recognize these committees and grant them protection on the battlefield. The original Geneva Convention, adopted in 1864, made these ideas reality and constitutes the foundation of modern-day international humanitarian law.[26]

The *International Committee of the Red Cross* concludes that: "Today, 160 years on, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement brings together 192 National Societies, all united by the desire to alleviate human suffering and provide assistance to the most vulnerable people, wherever they are."[27] This researcher fully supports the mission and relevancy of the Red Cross as expressed in this statement: "Our neutrality enables us to cross front lines. Moreover, a person's political opinions, class, nationality, gender, beliefs and so on never determine who receives aid. Only one thing

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[25] International Committee of the Red Cross, "160 Years on the Side of Humanity: A Commitment that has Never Waned," ICRC, https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/history/160-years-humanity/.

[26] International Committee of the Red Cross, "160 Years on the Side of Humanity: A Commitment that has Never Waned," ICRC, https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/history/160-years-humanity/.

[27] International Committee of the Red Cross, "160 Years on the Side of Humanity: A Commitment that has Never Waned," ICRC, https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/history/160-years-humanity/.

matters: who is in need? Our humanitarian action is based on the Movement's well-known Fundamental Principles."[28]

Honors

Jean-Henri Dunant's humanitarian efforts and acts of genuine hospitality were undoubtedly deserving of honor and serve as a model for preparing church leaders to engage with and serve the surrounding community. Sam McFarland highlighted one such honor: Dunant receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, in his writing titled *A Brief History of An Unsung Hero and Leader – Jean-Henry Dunant and the Founding of the Red Cross at the Geneva Convention,* published in the *International Journal of Leadership and Change.*

> Dunant received the first Nobel Peace Prize, awarded in 1901, for his founding of the International Red Cross movement. When the Nobel Committee notified Dunant that he would be receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, it stated: There is no man who more deserves this honour, for it was you, forty years ago, who set on foot the international organization for the relief of the wounded on the battlefield. Without you, the Red Cross, the supreme humanitarian achievement of the nineteenth century, would probably have never been undertaken.[29]

According to McFarland, "the prize money, 104,000 Swiss Francs, was placed in a Norwegian Bank. Dunant never spent any of it during his lifetime."[30] Emphasizing Dunant's spirit of hospitality and generosity, McFarland points out that "Dunant willed some of the money to the nursing home where he had stayed to provide care for a poor

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[28] International Committee of the Red Cross, "160 Years on the Side of Humanity: A Commitment that has Never Waned," ICRC, https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/history/160-years-humanity/.

[29] Sam McFarland, "A Brief History of An Unsung Hero and Leader – Jean Henry Dunant and the Founding of the Red Cross at the Geneva Convention," *International Journal of Leadership and Change*, https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/ijlc/vol5/iss1/5.

[30] Sam McFarland, "A Brief History of An Unsung Hero and Leader – Jean Henry Dunant and the Founding of the Red Cross at the Geneva Convention," *International Journal of Leadership and Change*, https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/ijlc/vol5/iss1/5.

person of the region who otherwise could not afford care. He left money to charities in Norway and Switzerland, and other funds went to pay some of his long-standing debts."[31]

Conclusion

The connection between Jean-Henri Dunant's commitment to inclusive compassion and hospitality and the biblical approach to equipping church leaders for community engagement can be summarized by these words found on springer.com:

> Jean-Henri Dunant is renowned for his humanitarian efforts, particularly in organizing aid for wounded soldiers without regard to nationality during the Battle of Solferino. He advocated for the care of the wounded, regardless of their side in the conflict, and this inclusive approach led to the founding of the Red Cross. His actions embodied the principles of hospitality and inclusion, setting a precedent for international humanitarian law and organizations.[32]

Dunant's life exemplifies biblical hospitality that can be modeled at Gethsemane Baptist Church. The reality is that equipping church leaders to engage with the surrounding community necessitates educating both church leaders and members about the importance of biblical and Christian hospitality for the purpose of making disciples of Jesus Christ, as highlighted by Camilla Klein in her article "The Ultimate Guide to Christian Hospitality: What the Bible Says" on christianeducatorsacademy.com:

> Christian hospitality is more than simply entertaining guests; it is a reflection of God's love for all people. In the Bible, we see numerous examples of hospitality, including Abraham's welcome of three strangers in Genesis and Jesus' fellowship with Zacchaeus in Luke. Scripture teaches us that hospitality is not only a virtue,

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[31] Sam McFarland, "A Brief History of An Unsung Hero and Leader – Jean Henry Dunant and the Founding of the Red Cross at the Geneva Convention," *International Journal of Leadership and Change*, https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/ijlc/vol5/iss1/5.

[32] Springer, "Jean-Henri Dunant," Springer, https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-99675-2-197-1.

but a commandment. Romans 12:13 urges us to "share with the Lord's people who are in need" and to "practice hospitality."[33]

Klein provides these examples of hospitality in the Bible which can be shared in our churches:

1. The Bible provides numerous examples of hospitality, showcasing its importance in the Christian faith. One such example is Abraham, who welcomed three strangers into his tent and served them a meal. He didn't know they were actually angels sent by God, but his act of hospitality pleased God.

2. Another example is the story of the Good Samaritan, who showed hospitality to a stranger in need by tending to his wounds and paying for his care. Despite the fact that the stranger was from a different ethnic and religious background, the Samaritan showed him love and kindness.

3. Jesus himself also modeled hospitality by sharing meals with his disciples and with others, including tax collectors and sinners. He showed that hospitality is not just about serving those who can do something for us in return, but about welcoming and loving all people, regardless of their status or background. These examples demonstrate that hospitality is a vital part of the Christian life, and that it involves not only serving others but also loving them unconditionally. By extending hospitality, we can reflect God's love and bring people closer to Him.[34]

This researcher agrees with Klein's conclusion: "So let us follow these examples and strive to practice hospitality in our own lives, following the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves and to show kindness to strangers."[35]

As this project serves as a model of biblical hospitality for equipping church leaders to engage with the surrounding community, as illustrated by the life of Jean-Henri

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[33] Camilla Klein, "The Ultimate Guide to Christian Hospitality: What the Bible Says," Christian Educators Academy, https://christianeducatorsacademy.com/the-ultimate-guide-to-christian-hospitality-what-the-bible-says/.

[34] Camilla Klein, "The Ultimate Guide to Christian Hospitality: What the Bible Says," Christian Educators Academy, https://christianeducatorsacademy.com/the-ultimate-guide-to-christian-hospitality-what-the-bible-says/.

[35] Camilla Klein, "The Ultimate Guide to Christian Hospitality: What the Bible Says," Christian Educators Academy, https://christianeducatorsacademy.com/the-ultimate-guide-to-christian-hospitality-what-the-bible-says/.

Dunant, this researcher highlights the importance of identifying specific meaningful engagement methods. Tim Smith, in "Churches and Religious," discusses in his article "Seven Great Ways Churches Can Engage with Their Communities" the challenges modern churches face in remaining connected to their communities, particularly as the surrounding culture continues to evolve. Smith asserts, "Too often, churches retreat into their own bubble – interacting only with other churches and their own congregations, and leaving the communities in which they're located totally out in the cold. Church leaders have a responsibility – a duty! – to share themselves and the word of God with those around them."[36]

Here are the seven ways that Smith presents for churches to engage their communities, which emphasizes the key element of biblical hospitality - meeting the needs of the people:

> 1. Community Events
> Lots of churches have events that are hosted on their grounds for their congregations – events such as 4th of July parties and other celebrations – but these events shouldn't just be for church members. Next time your church is having a celebration like a cookout or a party, consider opening it up to the rest of the community. Post signs around the church neighborhood and tack up posters to telephone poles and shop windows. Post about the church event on Facebook and "share" it with friends – do whatever it takes to get the word out. The church doesn't have to push an agenda at these events. You're not trying to convert community members – you're simply looking to show them how God acts through the church, and be an example of his grace. You'll be surprised at the community reactions you'll see when you do so – being honest, open, and allowing all to come to your events can create quite a bit of good will, and spur some folks into learning more about your church, and your beliefs.
>
> 2. Vacation Bible School
> Vacation Bible Schools are fantastic ways to engage with the community. Summer is difficult for a lot of families – they don't have a lot of childcare options, and often don't have enough money to pay for summer childcare.

[36] Tim Smith, "Seven Great Ways Churches Can Engage with Their Communities," DialMyCall, https://dialmycall.com/blog/7-great-ways-churches-can-engage-with-their-communities.

Vacation Bible School gives churches a great way to provide the community with a necessary resource – free childcare – and pairs it with a great Biblical education that's targeted at kids. VBS is fun, kids love it, and the community will appreciate your church's efforts at making their lives a bit easier.

3. Help Those in Need

Do you have homeless people in your community? Are you near a shelter? Organize a trip to the shelter to help – you can sponsor meals, aid in fundraising efforts, or provide a concert or a gospel ministry to the residents of the shelter. As Matthew 5:42 says – Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. Living out this mission by helping those who are in desperate need is a great way to engage with the community, and glorify God through selflessness.

4. Clean up the Community

Engaging in the community can be as simple as cleaning up! If you live in an urban area, there's probably plenty of litter and other trash that you can help clean up, and there is a need for beautification even in rural areas.

You can also engage directly with community members by going door-to-door in the fall to rake leaves, or by shoveling snow during the winter. It's amazing what a simple gesture of goodwill such as this will do to brighten the hearts of those in the community.

5. Get Involved in Sports Teams

Local sports leagues are great ways to meet people in your community. Slow-pitch softball is especially popular among churches, as it's a lower-impact way to enjoy the companionship and fun, friendly competition that sports has to offer. Consider joining your local league – or starting one of your own! You're sure to attract people from far and wide in the community and engaging with these people on a personal level is the first step towards sharing the Word of God.

6. Share the Talents of Your Congregation

Do you have an expert plumber in your church? A top-notch tax accountant? A mechanic? Consider offering the talents of your congregation to the community – if they agree to it, of course. You can assemble a volunteer team of people who can provide free services to the needy. By doing so, you follow in the example of Christ and help to show the glory of God and his Church, while engaging with community members on a truly personal level.

7. Help the Community Stay in Touch with Your Church

It's not enough to simply engage with the community once – you should seek to keep them in the loop about activities, special services, and events as much as possible. An old-school way of doing this is with mailers and flyers – but these are not too effective as promotional tools.[37]

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[37] Tim Smith, "Seven Great Ways Churches Can Engage with Their Communities," DialMyCall, https://dialmycall.com/blog/7-great-ways-churches-can-engage-with-their-communities.

Smith also points out that "Modern churches can take advantage of services like DialMyCalls. This sophisticated messaging system can send pre-recorded voice and SMS text messages as well as emails directly to recipients, keeping them informed of whatever is happening at your church."[38]

Smith concludes that "Church growth doesn't just mean a rise in tithing, attendance, or notoriety – growth can be as simple as watching congregation members who engage with the community grow in their walk with Christ as they minister to those around them."[39]

[38] Tim Smith, "Seven Great Ways Churches Can Engage with Their Communities," DialMyCall, https://dialmycall.com/blog/7-great-ways-churches-can-engage-with-their-communities.

[39] Tim Smith, "Seven Great Ways Churches Can Engage with Their Communities," DialMyCall, https://dialmycall.com/blog/7-great-ways-churches-can-engage-with-their-communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

For this section of research, our theological focus will be on ecclesiology and discipleship. This study highlights the theological significance of equipping church leaders to engage the surrounding community through the development of a biblical hospitality model. This model has the potential to enable the leaders of Gethsemane Baptist Church to connect with the community by fostering a spirit of humility in service, emphasizing the importance of being hospitable to others regardless of economic, racial, and societal differences, enhancing involvement with the surrounding community, and making disciples for Jesus Christ.

In many churches, there has been insufficient theological teaching and focus on the Christian church—what it is, its purpose, its doctrines, and why we do what we do. While much attention has been given to church membership numbers, building structures, preaching styles, and marketing, the church has missed the mark in teaching the relevance of the church, according to the Bible, in the lives of everyone. This researcher believes that people need to be theologically educated about the church so they can understand how God works through it, learn how the church can assist them, feel welcomed by it, and become engaged in its activities. The desired outcome is for people to grow spiritually and become disciples of Jesus Christ. This desired outcome is

supported by authors Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke in their book entitled *How to Think Theologically*. These authors insist that "the community of faith is not only a community of worship and fellowship; it is also one of critical deliberative theological inquiry. We offer support to others, but we also offer them our insights about faith. We listen to theirs. Theological conversation occurs. We decide."[1]

In their discussion of theological reflection in Christian community, Stone and Duke expound on critical inquiry being essential to understanding the faith and workings of God. These authors present the elements of critical inquiry or critical thinking as follows:

> Description - To describe is to give a clearheaded look at the subject of theological reflection. The subject of that reflection is the *situation* and the *embedded theology* that is brought to that situation. Accurately describing every observable aspect and detail of the situation, the problem, or the topic and detecting the embedded theology is a first step toward dealing with it in an honest critical light. The journalistic questions "who, what, where, and when" are a good beginning for such description. Sometimes it is helpful to write down the results of our careful observation. *Questioning* helps us to observe accurately.
>
> Analysis – The analysis phase of critical theological thinking devotes itself to deeper, more probing questions. The task of critical thinking in Western Christianity during the twentieth century has focused on three main lines of questioning. The first, a by-product of modern philosophy and science, is the test by *reason and experience*. A second line of questioning has its roots in the rise of historical consciousness and modern approaches to the study of *history*. A third line of analytical questioning has as its focus *the conditions of human living* – the phychological, sociological, economic, and political forces that shape the course of human life.
>
> Framing a View – Theologies identify the meaning of things viewed through the eyes of faith. These theological meanings are formed by acts of interpretation, correlation, and assessment. A theologian frames a particular view by selecting it amid the range of options and centering it within the crosshairs of the Christian faith and the life context. Careful observation of the scene and exploration of its relationship to the core concerns of faith can lead to a more intentional, refined understanding of what it means for our life and for the community of faith.

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[1] Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 120.

> Judgment and Response – To judge, in the context of a critical theological method, is to make a choice. We select a view or an action that seems most apt in light of our deliberations. Critical thinking that stagnates at observation and analysis is self-indulgent. *We have to decide.* Fear of being wrong is no excuse; it is a risk every theologian takes. We form views, take a stand, commit ourselves, choose a course of action. Theological reflection is insufficient if it is done in isolation. Theological reflection occurs in the context of community. Because it is communal, it is also collaborative and dialogical. Our theology also is formed by the convictions of the community of faith. We influence each other's understanding of faith.[2]

This section includes a theological reflection of the impact of teaching on ecclesiology. In his Logos.com article entitled "Ecclesiology: What Do We Believe about the Church?" Christopher Kou defines ecclesiology as "the study of the Christian church. The word ecclesiology derives from the Greek ekklesia, usually translated in the New Testament as "church." Ecclesiology, then, encompasses what the Bible teaches about the church and one's theological convictions concerning it."[3]

The theological study of ecclesiology is highlighted by Ben Reichert in an article entitled "What Is Ecclesiology? The Study of the Church" on Christianity.com. Reichert notes that "In systematic theology, ecclesiology considers who is in the church. Systematic theologians attempt to take the whole of scripture and make it applicable to life. So, ecclesiologists seek to take the whole of scripture and understand what the Bible says about how churches should be structured, who should be ordained, and how the church views the Sacraments."[4]

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[2] Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 113-120.

[3] Christopher Kou, "Ecclesiology: What Do We Believe about the Church?" Logos, https://www.logos.com/grow/what-is-ecclesiology/.

[4] Ben Reichert, "What Is Ecclesiology? The Study of the Church," Logos, https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-study-ecclesiology.html.

This project will focus on teaching "Who is the church?" as Reichert insists this is the starting point of ecclesiology. Reichert quotes the answer to this question given by Augustus Hopkins Strong, a systematic theologian in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: "The church of Christ, in its largest signification, is the whole company of regenerate persons in all times and ages, in heaven and on earth. (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22, 23; 3:10; 5:24, 25; Col. 1:18; Heb. 12:23). In this sense, the church is identical with the spiritual kingdom of God; both signify that redeemed humanity in which God in Christ exercises actual spiritual dominion (John 3:3, 5)."[5] According to Reichert, "From this quotation, it is clear that Strong aligns himself with the Protestant Reformers—he stresses people's salvation is based in Christ, not tying it to a particular church figure or authority structure."[6]

This section includes a theologically focused look at discipleship as the overall purpose of the church engaging the surrounding community. The Gethsemane Baptist Church is committed to carrying out the Great Commission as stated in Matthew 28:19-20: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." This commitment involves teaching people how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ (follow him, have a relationship with him, be like him, share his love) and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

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[5] Ben Reichert, "What Is Ecclesiology? The Study of the Church," Logos, https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-study-ecclesiology.html.

[6] Ben Reichert, "What Is Ecclesiology? The Study of the Church," Christianity, https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-study-ecclesiology.html.

In his book entitled *The Cost of Discipleship*, author Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ according to the Bible:

> When the Bible speaks of following Jesus, it is proclaiming a discipleship which will liberate mankind from all man-made dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which afflicts the conscience. If they follow Jesus, men escape from the hard yoke of their own laws, and submit to the kindly yoke of Jesus Christ. The command of Jesus is hard, unutterably hard, for those who try to resist it. But for those who willingly submit, the yoke is easy, and the burden light. "His commandments are not grievous" (1 Jn. 5.3). The command of Jesus is not a sort of spiritual shock treatment. Jesus asks nothing of us without giving us the strength to perform it. His commandment never seeks to destroy life, but to foster, strengthen and heal it.[7]

The conclusion of this section examines the theological significance of teaching ecclesiology and discipleship as part of practicing cross-cultural hospitality. An assessment of the Gethsemane Baptist Church's ministry operations has uncovered a lack of a biblical hospitality plan and an approach to engaging with the surrounding community. While the church offers several successful ministry programs, worship services, and Bible study classes, there has been insufficient attention to cross-cultural hospitality and engagement. To effectively develop and implement a plan theologically focused on this goal that fosters discipleship, there must be a systematic understanding of what the church is and what true discipleship entails. This understanding should be shared and embraced by both church leaders and congregants.

Ecclesiology

This researcher was intrigued by Reichert's presentation of Why Does Ecclesiology Matter Today?:

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[7] Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 37-38.

> What we believe about the church can impact what we believe about God. All orthodox Christian theologians (those who hold to the historic Christian faith) believe that there will be differences in church practices, yet people with different views of church government or baptism are still saved and brought into God's kingdom.
>
> Another reason ecclesiology matters today is that it helps us find unity in the church. Most Christians agree that the church is very divided these days. That is not a good thing. Rediscovering ecclesiology's importance can help us live out the prayer Jesus prayed for us in John 17. Understanding the differences between denominations and how they developed can help us recognize the essentials we agree on.
>
> Ecclesiology also helps believers avoid the "I love Jesus, but I can't stand the church" mentality. It shows that the church is vital for believers to experience fellowship. Our relationship with God is both individual and corporate. Understanding ecclesiology helps us live out Hebrews 10:24-25 better because we are not "neglecting to meet together, as some are in the habit of doing."
>
> Developing our ecclesiology will help us play a more vital role in our church communities because it enables us to join a team to reach the world around us. Ecclesiology can also help believers figure out where they stand on different doctrines. Understanding what denominations believe can help them find a church they agree with and can function well within. In doing so, they can find people to work with in reaching their neighbors with the Gospel.[8]

The doctrine of the church is termed ecclesiology by scholars, derived from ekklesia, the Greek word for church. In his book *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Alister E. McGrath points out that while ecclesiology was not a major issue in the early church, it was Isidore of Pelusium who defined the church as "the assembly of saints joined together by correct faith and an excellent manner of life."[9] McGrath also notes that the following elements can be discerned as having achieved a wide consensus at that time:

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[8] Ben Reichert, "What Is Ecclesiology? The Study of the Church," Christianity, https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-study-ecclesiology.html.

[9] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology, An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 477.

1. The church is a spiritual society, which replaces Israel as the people of God in the world.

2. All Christians are made one in Christ, despite their different origins and backgrounds.

3. The church is the repository of true Christian teaching.

4. The church gathers the faithful throughout the world together, to enable them to grow in faith and holiness.[10]

The Gethsemane Baptist Church views itself as a spiritual community and concurs with the following statement by Millard J. Erickson in his book *Christian Theology* about the necessity of balancing certain functions so that the church can fulfill its mission of carrying out Christ's ministry in the world:

> A balance of these functions is essential to the spiritual health and well-being of the body. The gospel is at the heart of the ministry of the church. When the gospel is modified, the church ceases to be balanced. To continue its existence, it is necessary for the church to be willing to serve, be adaptable in methodology, and be adaptable to its environment.[11]

Equipping church leaders to engage the surrounding community involves identifying, teaching, and practicing the true functions of the church. Erickson identifies Evangelism and Edification as essential functions of the church:

> Evangelism – The one topic emphasized in both accounts of Jesus's last words to his disciples is evangelism. In Matthew 28:19 he instructs them, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." In Acts he says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit come on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The call to evangelism is a command. Note also the extent of the commission: it is all-inclusive. Therefore, if the church is to be faithful to its Lord and bring joy to his heart, it must be engaged in bringing the gospel to all people. This includes people whom we may by nature tend to dislike. It extends to those who are unlike us. And it goes beyond our immediate sphere of contact and influence. In a very real sense, local evangelism, church extension or church planting, and world missions are all the same thing. The only difference lies in the length of the radius.

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[10] McGrath, *Christian Theology, An Introduction*, 477.

[11] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 971.

> Edification – The second major function of the church is the edification of believers. Paul repeatedly spoke of the edification of the body. In Ephesians 4:12, for example, he indicates that God has given various gifts to the church "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." There are several means by which members of the church are to be edified. One of them is fellowship. The New Testament speaks of koinonia, literally, having or holding all things in common. On occasion this may entail correction and rebuke, which should be administered lovingly. One of the values of community is that the church becomes the guard against the tendencies of individuals to deviate in favor of the bias of their own ideas and desires. The church also edifies its members through instruction or teaching. This is part of the broad task of discipling. Education may take many forms and occur on many levels. It is incumbent upon the church to utilize all legitimate means and technologies available today. Since the church has the task of teaching the truth of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, by implication it has the obligation to grow in its understanding of that revelation. Thus the task of biblical scholarship is incumbent upon the church. This task is carried out by specialists who possess gifts in such matters. Preaching is another means of instruction that has been used by the Christian church from its very beginning. To the end of mutual edification God has equipped the church with various gifts apportioned and bestowed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11). The Holy Spirit in his wisdom has given just what is needed, so that the body may be properly built up and equipped.[12]

Gethsemane Baptist Church recognizes the importance of engaging in meaningful worship experiences and tackling the social issues faced by the surrounding community. Erickson identifies Worship and Social Concern as essential functions of the church:

> Worship – Worship concentrates on the Lord. The early church came together to worship on a regular schedule, a practice commanded and commended by the apostle Paul. His direction to the Corinthians to set aside money for worship on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:2) intimates that they regularly gathered for worship on that day. Worship, the praise and exaltation of God, was a common Old Testament practice, as can be seen particularly in the book of Psalms. In this aspect of its activity, the church centers its attention on who and what God is, not on itself. It aims at appropriately expressing God's nature, not at satisfying its own feelings. Worship need not follow any one stereotyped form. There is room for considerable variation in style of music, liturgy, prayers, and message. To some extent, the form these elements take will vary in accordance with the culture within which the worship takes place. Elements of ancient practice may be utilized, or elements of contemporary culture, so long as these are not directly connected with beliefs and practices that conflict with those that are biblically revealed. In all of this, the focus should be on glorifying God and bringing the worshipper into contact with God. The goal should be neither preservation of a

[12] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 972-977.

> practice because it has been done that way for a long time, nor introduction of a practice for the sake of innovation.
>
> Social Concern – Cutting across the various functions of the church is its responsibility to perform acts of Christian love and compassion for both believers and non-Christians. It is clear that Jesus cared about the problems of the needy and the suffering. He healed the sick and even raised the dead on occasion. If the church is to carry on his ministry, it will be engaged in some form of ministry to the needy and the suffering. Social concern includes condemning unrighteousness as well. The church is to show concern and take action wherever it sees need, hurt, or wrong. There will be differences of opinion as to the strategies and tactics that should be employed. In some cases, the church will work simply to alleviate the hurt, that is, to treat the consequences of the problem. In others, it will act to change the circumstances that have produced the problem. There will be times when the church acting collectively will be able to accomplish more than Christians acting individually; in other situations the reverse will be true.[13]

At Gethsemane Baptist Church, it became essential to recognize and teach that not only the church's functions, but also the attitude or disposition with which the church performs its functions, is of utmost importance, as reflected in Erickson's premise about the character of the church: "Since the church is, in its continuing existence, Christ's body and bears his name, it should be characterized by the attributes Christ manifested during his physical incarnation on earth. Two of these attributes are crucial as the church operates in our rapidly changing world: willingness to serve and adaptability."[14]

Erickson gives this account of Willingness to Serve and Adaptability:

> Willingness to Serve - Jesus stated that his purpose in coming was not to be served, but to serve (Mt. 20:28). In becoming incarnate he took upon himself the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7). "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (v. 8). The church must display a similar willingness to serve. It has been placed in the world to serve its Lord and the world, not to be exalted and have its own needs and desires satisfied. Although the church may attain great size, wealth, and prestige, that is not its purpose. Jesus did not associate with people for what they could in turn do for him. Similarly, the church today will not determine its activity on the basis of what will enable it to prosper and grow. Rather, it will seek to

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[13] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 977-979.

[14] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 986.

> follow its Lord's example of service. It will be willing to go to the undesirables and helpless, those who cannot give anything in return to the church. Willingness to serve means that the church will not seek to dominate society for its own purposes.
>
> Adaptability – The church must also be versatile and flexible in adjusting its methods and procedures to the changing situations of the world in which it finds itself. It must go where needy persons are found, even if that means a geographical or cultural change. It must not cling to all its old ways. As the world to which it is trying to minister changes, the church will have to adapt its ministry accordingly, but without altering its basic direction. As the church adapts, it will be emulating its Lord, who did not hesitate to come to earth to redeem humanity. In doing so, he took on the conditions of the human race (Phil. 2:5-8). In similar fashion, the body of Christ will preserve the basic message with which it has been entrusted, and continue to fulfill the major functions of its task, but will make all legitimate changes necessary to carry out its Lord's purpose.[15]

Discipleship

Authors Avery T. Willis, Jr. and Kay Moore, in their book titled *MasterLife, The Disciple's Cross,* state that "Christian discipleship is developing a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ in which He transforms your character into Christlikeness; changes your values into Kingdom values, and involves you in His mission in the home, the church, and the world."

In his article entitled "Discipleship: Biblical Definition, History, What It is Today" on Theologyfortherestofus.com, Kenneth Ortiz gives this definition of Christian discipleship:

> Discipleship is the process a person goes through to go from being an unbeliever to a committed believer in Jesus Christ. Unbelievers are mainly committed to finding joy and fulfillment in things other than God, but committed believers are committed primarily to bringing glory to God and finding their joy in him.[16]

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[15] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 986-988.

[16] Kenneth Ortiz, "Discipleship: Biblical Definition, History, What It is Today," Theology for the Rest of Us, https://www.theologyfortherestofus.com/discipleship-biblical-definition-history-what-it-is-today/.

Addressing the question, Why is discipleship important? Ortiz states that:

> Discipleship is important because it's the process (or instrument) by which people grow in their faith. We want other people to become mature committed followers of Jesus Christ. Without discipleship, people don't grow in their faith, they don't grow in their commitment to living for Jesus, and they will typically miss out on things Jesus has for them in their life.[17]

While speaking about the church's responsibility for discipleship, Godwin Sathianathan in his article on Thegospelcoalition.org entitled "Grow a Disciple-Making Culture in Your Church" insists that "Disciple-making is an intentional process of evangelizing non-believers, establishing believers in the faith, and equipping leaders. "Make disciples" implies intentionality and process."[18] According to Sathianathan, "It is a deliberate process. Considering the modifying participles of "going . . . baptizing . . . teaching" help us recognize this process. It must include evangelizing (going to new people and new places), establishing (baptizing new believers and teaching obedience), and equipping (teaching believers to also make disciples)."[19]

The Gethsemane Baptist Church is committed to expanding its discipleship approach to equipping church leaders to engage the surrounding community by acknowledging that it truly takes a village. This concept is supported in an article entitled "The Role of Community in Discipleship" on Cru.org:

> The village is a place where groups of believers freely involve themselves in each other's lives, and challenge each other to take those next steps of faith. The

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[17] Kenneth Ortiz, "Discipleship: Biblical Definition, History, What It is Today," Theology for the Rest of Us, https://www.theologyfortherestofus.com/discipleship-biblical-definition-history-what-it-is-today/.

[18] Godwin Sathianathan, "Grow a Disciple-Making Culture in Your Church," The Gospel Coalition, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-to-grow-a-disciple-making-culture-in-your-church.

[19] Godwin Sathianathan, "Grow a Disciple-Making Culture in Your Church," The Gospel Coalition, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-to-grow-a-disciple-making-culture-in-your-church.

> village includes believers both mature and young, mentors and peers, and is a place where the lost are welcome to join. The village is a home with an open door where your presence matters, where truth goes forth with grace, and where friends together pursue Christ-likeness. Discipleship is the process where believers help one another become better followers of Christ.[20]

According to Cru, the impact a village has in developing disciples is as follows:

> 1. First, community helps bring the Word of God alive and make it real. From the beginning, God wanted His Word to play a vital role through community. After Moses wrote the Law, he commanded the people every seven years to "read this law before all Israel in their hearing" (Dt. 31:10). Why did they emphasize reading as a community instead of individually? Moses wanted Israel to "hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children who have not known it may hear and fear the Lord" (Dt. 4:12-13). Throughout the Old Testament, when Israel neglected this command, God brought revival through the reading of His Word. Look at the examples of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34:29-33 and Nehemiah in Nehemiah 9. The New Testament also shows a focus on community times of teaching the Scriptures (Acts 2:42, Acts 19:9, etc.). Paul exhorted Timothy to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture" (1 Timothy 4:13). The Bible shows clearly the impact of God's Word read and taught in communities.
>
> 2. A second way discipleship occurs in community is through prayer.
> Once again, individual prayer is absolutely vital. Jesus often withdrew to pray alone. However, it is not enough, for prayer ignites in the context of community. Throughout the Bible, prayer in communities of God's people often brought about significant life change. For example, Joshua along with the elders of Israel (a community of leadership) together sought God's favor after the sin of Achan (Jo. 7:6). The book of Judges shows a pattern of God's people sinning, then corporately crying out to God. Only then does God bring forth a judge who restores His people and brings revival. Jesus often modeled the value of community prayer (Mt. 18:19-20). Perhaps the clearest New Testament example comes in Acts 4. After Peter and John's arrest and release, the early church met together to pray. "They lifted their voices together to God" (Acts 4:24). Together they asked God to give them boldness, and God answered dramatically. "When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). Prayer ignites in the context
> of community.
>
> 3. Christians usually view the third area of discipleship, evangelism, as an event for individuals. However, evangelism too explodes in the context of community. The early church understood this power, for as a community they preached the

[20] Cru, "The Role of Community in Discipleship," Cru, https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/help-others-grow/discipleship/the-role-of-community-in-discipleship.html.

gospel with boldness, and people responded. "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Paul commended the Thessalonian church saying, "not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere" (1 Thes. 1:8). Evangelism explodes in the context of community. Evangelism can be contagious. It is far easier to share your faith while surrounded by others who share their faith.

5. A fourth aspect of discipleship is character growth. The village is a powerful place where life change can occur in many ways. Community can impact character growth by spurring on group revival. God can inspire people as a group to seek changed lives (2 Chr. 34, Neh. 9, Jon. 3). The community challenges individuals to seek after God, transforming the entire community. Community can also be helpful in correction and reconciling relationships. Jesus challenged His followers to involve several others, or even the entire church to win over a brother who "sinned against you" (Mt. 18:13-17). God can also use individuals known in a community to help encourage Christlike behavior. The village also can play a significant role in helping individuals see victory over sin. James challenges believers to "confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed" (Jas. 5:16). There is healing power in confessing our sins to caring friends. While these character issues should also come to light in individual friendships, a loving community can more effectively embrace a struggling believer. "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of those who are weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up" (Rom. 15:1-2). True character change happens best in community.[21]

This researcher was intrigued by the reference to "the beauty of service and evangelism as essential parts of discipleship,"[22] as stated by Deborah Sodipe in her article entitled "4 Ways Churches Can Engage Their Neighborhoods." According to Sodipe, "engaging your neighborhood isn't just for the super-spiritual; it's for every Christ follower. Scripture reminds us that our faith is expressed through our works and love for one another (Jas. 2; Jn. 13:34–35). Because of the cross, we were not only saved from

[21] Cru, "The Role of Community in Discipleship," Cru, https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/help-others-grow/discipleship/the-role-of-community-in-discipleship.html.

[22] Deborah Sodipe, "4 Ways Churches Can Engage Their Neighborhoods," https://radical.net/article/churches-engage-their-neighborhoods/.

something but also saved for something—to be active agents of redemption and restoration (Eph. 2:1–10).[23]

Sodipe presents these four practical ways for churches to mobilize its gifts to engage their neighborhoods:

> 1. Take Inventory of Your Talents
> Look at your church community. What talents and professions do the people around you have? There may be college students you can host, or legal services can be provided; hairstylists and barbers can sponsor back-to-school haircuts. There are countless opportunities for service in every profession!
>
> 2. Investigate Opportunities
> What are the unique social and economic needs in your neighborhood? This requires some research. Dive into the history of your area, and look closely at the community around you. Often, we become so busy with our daily lives that we miss the brokenness surrounding us. We need healthy disruptions from our routines to truly see and engage with our community's needs.
> When investigating your neighborhood, consider the following:
> Demographics: Are there retirement communities, single-parent homes, or college students?
> Economic Status: Is there a large homeless population or wealthier areas nearby?
> Access: Are there resource deserts (food, healthcare) or transportation challenges?
> History: What systemic issues have shaped your community's needs?
>
> 3. Don't Try to Recreate the Wheel
> You don't need to start something from scratch to make a difference. Instead, consider how you can partner with existing initiatives in your city. God calls us to be faithful, which may mean starting small to fill a gap or joining a work he's already begun.
> To discern what to start or who to partner with, look at the resources available in your community. If you discover that no one is addressing a specific need, that may be God's invitation for you to step in and create something new.
>
> 4. Just Do Something
> After considering these steps, the next move is to just do something! We often think we need everything perfectly lined up before we can engage, but that's far from the truth. You'll stumble and say the wrong things but trust that God will catch you. Tiny acts of faithfulness can shift the course of someone's eternity.[24]

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[23] Deborah Sodipe, "4 Ways Churches Can Engage Their Neighborhoods," https://radical.net/article/churches-engage-their-neighborhoods/.

[24] Deborah Sodipe, "4 Ways Churches Can Engage Their Neighborhoods," https://radical.net/article/churches-engage-their-neighborhoods/.

Conclusion

This study of ecclesiology and discipleship highlights the importance of equipping church leaders to engage with the surrounding community. The practice of cross-cultural hospitality is vital to this process, particularly as Gethsemane Baptist Church undertakes necessary steps to transform lives by fostering more relational connections with individuals from various cultures in the community. This researcher concurs with the conclusion of authors Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer in their book, *Transformational Church,* about this concept:

> We treasure the concept of "transformation," because radical change is the heart of the Christian message and because the power of the gospel changes everything – lives, churches, and communities. Christians love "church" because God has chosen the community of Christ followers to make known His manifold wisdom (Eph. 3:10). When God transforms lives, He doesn't just build temples of the Holy Spirit in individuals, He builds His church by adding more lives to the body. God uses the individuals in the church to bring about the transformation of more individuals and, consequently, the growth of the church. The church is God's tool and instrument for His kingdom agenda.[25]

Stetzer and Rainer reflect on how transformative leaders cultivate relationships within the community and create space for individuals to seek and follow God. They note that in transformational churches "Everybody, regardless of spiritual background, is invited to serve. People are invited to deeper relationships the first day they walk in the door. They are personally invited into fun, informal relationships, immediately making a difference in their lives."[26]

This project aims to develop intentional relationships with individuals in the surrounding community to help them become disciples of Jesus Christ, irrespective of

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[25] Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2010), 1.

[26] Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 102.

cultural differences, as supported by Stetzer and Rainer: "The goal of the church – an intense focus of TCs – is to make disciples. The disciple-making task necessitates that people care about one another while they do it. Additionally, TCs have discovered that lost people hunger for deeper relationships. When they witness deeper relationships in the local church, a clearer path is made to understanding the gospel."[27]

While cross-cultural hospitality is essential, it may require extensive training in the local church. Benjamin D. Espinoza sheds light on this matter in his article entitled "Practicing the Welcoming Gospel: Hospitality in Cross-cultural Ministries" on *Missionexus.org*, noting, "Conceptualizing cross-cultural ministries as an exercise in hospitality should cause missionaries and educators in global contexts to radically rethink the purpose and scope of traditional ministry efforts. Rather than being centered exclusively on the transmission of religious facts and historic doctrines, cross-cultural ministries and teaching must be a significant exercise in the practice of hospitality."[28]

Espinoza provides this summation of the extent to which hospitable cross-cultural ministries engage their communities:

> Hospitable cross-cultural ministries go beyond simply providing a warm and inviting atmosphere. Hospitality will not look the same in every culture, and sometimes, hospitality in one culture may look the opposite of hospitality in another. We must remain open, receptive, and sensitive to the Spirit's leading when we seek to become more hospitable teachers and ministers in cross-cultural contexts. Engaging in hospitality means that we are participating in the

[27] Benjamin D. Espinoza, "Practicing the Welcoming Gospel: Hospitality in Cross-Cultural Ministries," Missio Nexus, https://missionexus.org/practicing-the-welcoming-gospel-hospitality-in-cross-cultural-ministries/.

[28] Benjamin D. Espinoza, "Practicing the Welcoming Gospel: Hospitality in Cross-Cultural Ministries," Missio Nexus, https://missionexus.org/practicing-the-welcoming-gospel-hospitality-in-cross-cultural-ministries/.

> grand act of God, who is continuously seeking, inviting, and sharing his love with all people.[29]

Cross-cultural hospitality has been termed ‘multiethnic kingdom culture’ in an article entitled “Five Steps to Cultivate Your Church’s Multiethnic Kingdom Culture” This article points out that:

> To create a multiethnic kingdom culture means to establish a church that welcomes people from every nation, tribe, and tongue, seeking to disciple them in the likeness of Christ. We want to help people find their identity in Christ through His gospel, all the while embracing their ethnic identity and celebrating what is good, true, and beautiful about who God created them to be.[30]

The article further notes how the multiethnic church has been around for a long time:

> The multiethnic church is no new thing. It is part of God’s redemptive narrative from Genesis to Revelation, and we find this truth throughout Scripture. When the church was first born in the book of Acts, God gave His people the supernatural gift of tongues. On the very first day of Pentecost, 12 language groups were birthed into the kingdom of God, there in Jerusalem, as part of the church. It was comprised of people from all different walks of life, both rich and poor, with different shades of melanin, all gathering together for the same mission.[31]

Churches can take steps toward cultivating a multiethnic kingdom culture, from the parking lot to the pulpit if they:

> 1. Embrace unity through prayer - To achieve this end, prayer is essential. We read of this prayer-fueled unification in Acts 2, as the church gathered and prayed together fervently. We need the Spirit of the Lord to break through barriers and to draw our hearts nearer to Him. Praying together in community brings people’s hearts together as we pursue the heart of the Father in unity. One of the main unifiers in a community is the presence of suffering. One of the ways to build a

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[29] Benjamin D. Espinoza, “Practicing the Welcoming Gospel: Hospitality in Cross-Cultural Ministries,” Missio Nexus, https://missionexus.org/practicing-the-welcoming-gospel-hospitality-in-cross-cultural-ministries/.

[30] NewChurches.com, “Five Steps to Cultivate Your Church’s Multiethnic Kingdom Culture,” New Churches, https://www.newchurches.com/resources/5-steps-to-cultivate-your-churchs-multiethnic-kingdom-culture/.

[31] NewChurches.com, “Five Steps to Cultivate Your Church’s Multiethnic Kingdom Culture,” New Churches, https://www.newchurches.com/resources/5-steps-to-cultivate-your-churchs-multiethnic-kingdom-culture/.

multi-ethnic church culture is by pursuing unity through prayer. These shared experiences bring us together as a congregation, led by the spiritual discipline of prayer.

2. Exercise biblical hospitality - Another basic discipline is hospitality. As you think about casting a multiethnic vision, remember the importance of creating a welcoming space for those outside the church. Your space communicates to people who you are and what you're about. What are the first things they see, even before entering the building? When someone walks in, what will they find hanging up on the wall? Make sure a welcoming presence is there to greet them at the entrance and while they walk through the doors of the sanctuary. Make sure there are multiple touchpoints for hospitality as newcomers move throughout the building. We can all think of moments when we experienced incredible hospitality and how those efforts made us feel like we belonged and were part of the larger group surrounding us. Ultimately, we see hospitality in the life and ministry of Jesus, how He welcomed people no matter who they were, how broken they were, or how different their backgrounds were. He spent time with those who were unlike him, ate with them, and created a space for them. As Christians, the way forward is to model hospitality.

3. Model it for your congregation - Even if an area is completely homogenous, its people can still cultivate a multiethnic kingdom culture. At the end of the day, it's about teaching your congregation to love their neighbors as themselves, instructing them to decenter their own "ethnic love," so to speak, and to welcome other ethnicities and cultures. You can disciple your people by quoting diverse crowds, preachers, and teachers and by making sure you're not just learning from those within your own ethnic makeup. You can also make sure that the children in your nursery are prepared to cross cultures as they leave your student ministry for college and the world beyond. We accomplish this by educating our congregations and imparting to them the knowledge that the kingdom of God is larger than just the people we see in our own church pews. Consider what you can do to make this gospel truth accessible to your people.

4. Be intentional - Intentionality matters in the multiethnic church. Without it, you won't go far. There's a sense in which you want to move forward organically, but you still have to be intentional in order to move the ball forward at all. When your fellow leaders can come to the table as learners and help put together an intentional plan, you can be more intent on caring for your congregation and shepherding them well. Building social capital takes time, and it does not happen by accident. The natural tendency of the flesh is to gravitate toward things that are like us. So, without intentionality as leaders, progress will be harder to come by. Be intentional about this idea of pursuing a multiethnic sense of unity.

5. Celebrate the kingdom of God - Celebrate the fact that you are already a part of a greater multiethnic, multigenerational, multi-social economic church—the body of Christ! And in that realization, cultivate curiosity. No matter where you are, if

> you're in a homogenous or more diverse space, choose to see people as fearfully and wonderfully made. Come to them with the humility of having something to learn. If they are in Christ, they have something to teach us. One day, they're going to share their story in heaven about how God saved them and washed them with the blood of Christ.[32]

For the leaders of Gethsemane Baptist Church, the call to teach the theology of ecclesiology and discipleship offers a unique opportunity to become a transformational church, build meaningful relationships, practice cross-cultural hospitality, and emerge prepared to engage the surrounding community. The church leaders are dedicated to learning what some might deem 'radical' hospitality practices to foster humility in serving, highlight the importance of being hospitable to others regardless of economic, racial, and societal differences, improve engagement with the surrounding community, and make disciples for Jesus Christ.

According to Robert Schnase in his book *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, "Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Radical Hospitality. Out of genuine love for Christ and for others, their laity and pastors take the initiative to invite, welcome, include, and support newcomers and help them grow in faith as they become part of the Body of Christ."[33] Schnase expounds on what he means by radical hospitality as follows:

> I mean people offering the absolute utmost of themselves, their creativity, their abilities, and their energy to offer the gracious invitation and reception of Christ to others. Churches characterized by Radical Hospitality are not just friendly and courteous, passively receiving visitors warmly. Instead, they exhibit a restlessness because they realize so many people do not have a relationship to a faith community. They sense a calling and responsibility to pray, plan, and work to

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[32] New Churches, "Five Steps to Cultivate Your Church's Multiethnic Kingdom Culture," New Churches, https://www.newchurches.com/resources/5-steps-to-cultivate-your-churchs-multiethnic-kingdom-culture/.

[33] Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 11.

invite others and to help them feel welcome and to support them in their faith journeys. They desire to learn about inviting and welcoming more people and younger people and more diverse people into their congregations.[34]

[34] Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, 21.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATION

Introduction

This researcher has found that the biblical, historical, and theological foundations presented for a biblical hospitality approach to equipping church leaders to engage the surrounding community are further informed by the non-church-related discipline of customer service, as modeled in this section. Specifically, just as changes in the mindset, teaching, and practices of church leaders have the potential to facilitate church-community connection, Walt Disney's commitment to excellence in customer service has had a significant impact on the entertainment industry.

This concept of excellent customer service will be examined to support the project titled "A Biblical Hospitality Approach to Equipping Church Leaders to Engage the Surrounding Community." The project will focus on developing a purposeful customer service and hospitality training program within the church. This program has the potential to help church leaders foster a greater spirit of humility in their service, recognize the importance of being welcoming to individuals regardless of their economic, racial, and social backgrounds, and enhance their engagement with the surrounding community.

Gethsemane Baptist Church has been in existence for one hundred eighteen years. It has witnessed significant changes in the community, including the construction of homes, apartments, businesses, and schools, as well as the evolving demographics of the

residents. Due to these changes, the church has lost its connection with those living in the surrounding area. This researcher believes that if the church intentionally engages the community to seek fellowship, evangelize, worship, and design its programs with deliberate inclusivity, it will foster a connection with a demographic it does not typically reach out to.

This researcher believes and is convinced that the best way to serve God is by serving God's people unconditionally, regardless of race, culture, or economic standing, both foreign and domestic. In ministry, we should always strive to meet people's needs in all aspects: spiritually, emotionally, physically, socially, and economically, bringing hope and the love of God to everyone. The Old and New Testaments clearly speak of God's desire for salvation to be shared with humankind through His love, irrespective of race or culture. To share salvation, we must bridge the divide between church and community, regardless of color or culture. Given the current racial divide, we should emphasize evangelizing communities that do not always look like us. The Bible provides ample evidence for sharing God's love and ways with all people.

Churches, including Gethsemane Baptist Church, are becoming increasingly aware that individuals from diverse backgrounds are not being engaged by the church due to a lack of a biblical hospitality approach that equips church leaders to embrace diversity, demonstrate inclusivity, develop customer service training, and create a welcoming environment. Instead of relying on impersonal promotions, traditional outreach events, wishful thinking, current culture, or the mindset of 'we're here if you need us,' research indicates that the connection between church and community requires

a genuine assessment of the church's culture and is facilitated by leaders who are held accountable and provided with the necessary tools for this task.

Equipping church leaders requires training in the areas of behavior and language. In his article entitled "Ten Ways to Make Outsiders Become Insiders in Your Church," George Sinclair states that "we insiders are also not usually aware of the specific behaviors, habits, and attitudes that we personally have, which contribute to pushing people away."[1] One of Sinclair's suggestions is to "Encourage people to use the language of "guests" rather than "visitors." This switch is more than semantic. We know that we must move to a different level of hospitality when we have guests instead of visitors. In fact, the very word "guest" implies intentional hospitality."[2]

Here are all ten ways to make outsiders become insiders in your church as presented by George Sinclair:

> 1) Please pray that your church will become great at helping "outsiders" become "insiders." Pray that God will work in your church so that "shields" will become weaker and weaker.
>
> 2) Encourage people to use the language of "guests" rather than "visitors." This switch is more than semantic. We know that we have to move to a different level of hospitality when we have guests instead of visitors. In fact, the very word "guest" implies intentional hospitality.
>
> 3) Please pray for yourself! Ask God to show you aspects of your behaviour, habits, or attitudes which are unwelcoming or insular or "pushing-away." Ask God to help you develop behaviours, habits, and attitudes that are welcoming and hospitable.
>
> 4) Commit to following the "5 minute rule." Before the service ends, notice someone you have not greeted before and commit to approaching the guests and

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[1] George Sinclair, "Ten Ways to Make Outsiders Become Insiders in Your Church," The Gospel Coalition, https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ten-ways-to-make-outsiders-become-insiders-in-your-church/.

[2] George Sinclair, "Ten Ways to Make Outsiders Become Insiders in Your Church," The Gospel Coalition, https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ten-ways-to-make-outsiders-become-insiders-in-your-church/.

newcomers for the first 5 minutes after the service ends. Please note, most of us unconsciously seek out our friends in the first 5 minutes. If we do seek out a new person to greet, we do this after we have connected to our friends or the church member we have to connect with.
But usually our friends will still be there ten minutes later, but the guest will be long gone after having no one speak to them. So we need to commit to seeking out "new" people first. Remember that having someone say "hi" as you enter the building is good, but a new person will see this as the greeter's job. So in a real sense, it does not count as being welcomed. What really matters is the person nearby who says, "Hi."

5) If your church has a "coffee" or "fellowship" time after the service, (in the lobby or some other spot) commit to practicing the "5 Minute" rule there as well. Everything I said in the previous point applies here, so look for the guest and walk towards them first, and your friends second.

6) What about making the scary mistake of going up to greet a new person, only to be told that they have been coming to the church for 25 years? Simple, have a laugh over it. Use that as the launching pad for a discussion of the church. What happens if the 25 year member is insulted by you approaching them as if they were new? Once again, simple. Apologize and withdraw. And commit to pray for a brother or sister who is obviously grumpy, humourless, and not showing the fruit of the Spirit. If they are like that with you, they are probably like that with others, and so the Lord has shown you a new way to pray for the church and its members.

7) Can a young person welcome a far older person? Can a far older person welcome a young person? Absolutely. In fact I have talked to many people who say that such a welcome is a very welcome surprise. It goes against the grain of our culture to cross such an age divide, so people appreciate the welcome when it happens.

8) Can a man welcome a woman or a woman welcome a man? Won't it seem like there might be a hidden motive? Generally I think it is not wise if a person greets a member of the opposite sex, especially if they are around the same age. But there are several things you can do. You could get a member of the opposite sex to approach the guest/newcomer instead of you or with you. If that is not workable, get one or two others to join you. Another possibility is good advice in all welcoming: meet them, and then introduce them to others. Expand the circle of people who now know the newcomer/guest.

9) What about those of us who are shy or introverted? As an introvert myself, I know this is a good question. However, welcoming is not something that only extroverts can do. In fact, your shyness and/or introversion can be a great impetus to pray for your church in this area, and to pray for yourself, that you will walk across the room and welcome. I say this because an introverted and/or shy person

> knows how hard it is to be the new person in the room; or to get coffee and then stand there all alone not knowing what to do next. You know this in your bones, so pray with all your heart for yourself and your church that you and others will welcome well.
>
> 10) Finally, please do not wait for others to do these things before you do them. Please do not say, "I'm going to wait till the leaders or the old-timers or the extroverts do this before I do." It might be that the Lord is calling you to step-up and take leadership in this area. That may be why this is a "burden" for you. Maybe the Lord is calling you to step-up and help by providing leadership in developing and implementing concrete steps to help the church be welcoming. Please pray about this, and oh yes, please pray for me and the church I serve in.[3]

Chuck Lawless speaks to the significance of assessing church culture in his blog entitled "Twelve Questions to Evaluate Your Church's Culture" as he points out that "every church has a culture, whether it be positive or negative. The problem, though, is that too few churches take time to consider their culture – and they seldom grow."[4] Lawless offers some questions to help churches review their culture:

1. Is church for your congregation a Sunday event, or is it a life-on-life commitment? Church that is "Sunday only" seldom leads to significant life change; on the other hand, life-on-life church is attractive and transforming.

2. Can your members state and explain your church's mission statement? If not, it's likely the church hasn't adequately created a culture around its mission.

3. Do members want to serve through your congregation? Churches with a culture of service not only challenge members to get involved, but they also make it easy to know how to serve.

4. If I were absent from worship services for a few weeks, would I be missed? I realize church size matters here at some level, but a culture of pastoral care will lead a church to follow up on absentee members.

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[3] George Sinclair, "Ten Ways to Make Outsiders Become Insiders in Your Church," The Gospel Coalition, https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ten-ways-to-make-outsiders-become-insiders-in-your-church/.

[4] Chuck Lawless, "Twelve Questions to Evaluate Your Church's Culture," Pastor Center, https://pastorscenter.org/blog/12-questions-to-evaluate-your-churches-culture/.

5. Would other believers and the community turn to your church for prayer support? Not many churches have a culture of prayer – but those who do make a difference in a dark world.

6. When was the last time your church sent out your best to be church planters or missionaries? If your church hangs on to your best and seldom calls out the called, your culture is probably inwardly-focused.

7. Do missionaries on the field know how well your church supports missionaries you've sent from your congregation? Missionaries talk, both about churches who ignore their sent-ones and about those who care deeply and consistently from a distance.

8. Do guests and members recognize excitement and joy when your church gathers for worship? I admit this is a feeling question, but emotion does indicate something. Churches who love to worship God make that evident, and they talk about Jesus and their church in the streets.

9. Do your leaders protect their turf, or are they joyfully committed to producing the next generation of leaders? Cultures of protection are stifling and unhealthy; cultures of reproduction are exciting and visionary.

10. Does your church have a clearly stated and followed discipleship strategy? Churches that reach non-believers, lead them to Christ, and then help them grow with intentionality simply have a different kind of culture.

11. What does the community believe about your church? Their perception may not be accurate, but it's not wrong to view perception as reality. Often, your community will have an accurate perception of whether your church is a vibrant or dying one.

12. Does your church practice evaluation and improvement? If not, your church's culture is probably stagnant at best. Let these questions move you in a different direction.[5]

This project will benefit from the study of The Walt Disney Company's commitment to a culture of belonging as noted on Impact.disney.com: "Our intention is

[5] Chuck Lawless, "Twelve Questions to Evaluate Your Church's Culture," Pastors Center, https://pastorscenter.org/blog/12-questions-to-evaluate-your-churches-culture/.

to put the responsibility for an inclusive culture in the hands of our leaders and employees through comprehensive education and engagement efforts."[6]

Disney's commitment to a culture of belonging is further reflected in this core value statement noted on Impact.disney.com: "Across Disney, we cultivate, value, and encourage curiosity, collaboration, and creativity from everyone and we strive to build supportive environments that inspire optimism and drive innovation. We work to create a culture that is welcoming to all, celebrates our unique perspectives, and promotes respect for one another, regardless of identity or background."[7]

Interdisciplinary Theory

A church that properly equips its leaders can engage the surrounding community. Developing a biblical hospitality model that emphasizes customer service and focuses on the community's needs connects the church and community, changes lives, and makes disciples of Jesus Christ. Examining the customer service practices and strategies of The Walt Disney Company enables this researcher to extract training tools that can help prepare leaders of the Gethsemane Baptist Church to understand that building relationships and creating meaningful experiences are vital for engaging the local community.

According to Britannica.com, "Walt Disney (born December 5, 1901, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.—died December 15, 1966, Burbank, California) was an American motion-

[6] Impact.disney.com, "Our Commitment to a Culture of Belonging," Impact Disney, https://impact.disney.com/diversity-equity-inclusion/culture/.

[7] Impact Disney, "Culture, Disney Social Responsibility," Impact Disney, https://impact.disney.com/diversity-equity-inclusion/culture/.

picture and television producer and showman, famous as a pioneer of animated cartoon films and as the creator of such cartoon characters as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck."[8] Britannica.com further notes that "He also planned and built Disneyland, a huge amusement park that opened near Los Angeles in 1955, and before his death he had begun building a second such park, Walt Disney World, near Orlando, Florida. The Disney Company he founded has become one of the world's largest entertainment conglomerates."[9]

The mission of the Walt Disney Company is noted in "Disney – Leadership, History, Corporate Social Responsibility" on Thewaltdisneycompany.com as follows: "The mission of The Walt Disney Company is to entertain, inform and inspire people around the globe through the power of unparalleled storytelling, reflecting the iconic brands, creative minds and innovative technologies that make ours the world's premier entertainment company."[10] Regarding the businesses and leadership of The Walt Disney Company: "Together with its subsidiaries and affiliates, is a leading diversified international family entertainment and media enterprise that includes three core business segments: Disney Entertainment, ESPN, and Disney Experiences. Disney's leadership team oversees the world's premier entertainment company, home of the most respected and beloved brands around the globe."[11] The Walt Disney Company is committed to

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[8] Britannica, "Walt Disney," Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Walt-Disney/Legacy.

[9] Britannica, "Walt Disney," Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Walt-Disney/Legacy.

[10] The Walt Disney Company, "Disney – Leadership, History, Corporate Social Responsibility," The Walt Disney Company, https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about.

[11] The Walt Disney Company, "Disney – Leadership, History, Corporate Social Responsibility," The Walt Disney Company, https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about.

investing in their people: "We invest in the talent development, career mobility, safety, and overall well-being of our people to inspire and empower them to do their best."[12]

Equipping leaders to engage people is a common thread between the entertainment/hospitality industry and the church. In the book entitled *Be Our Guest, Perfecting the Art of Customer Service* by Theodore Kinni, Tom Staggs, Chairman of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts points out in his Foreword that "Creating the best possible experience for our guests to share with family, friends, loved ones, and colleagues is the essence of what we do, and it defines who we are."[13]

Overcoming challenges while equipping leaders is a common thread between the entertainment and hospitality industries and the church. The Walt Disney Company encounters significant challenges while maintaining customer-friendly employees and operations. Disney's resilience in the face of these obstacles could provide valuable lessons for church leaders being prepared to engage with the surrounding community. Kinni highlights these challenges faced by The Walt Disney Company:

- Economic downturns constrain spending and can threaten the very survival of organizations.
- Success breeds competition, and the competition is as hot as ever.
- No organization can succeed without a great workforce.
- No organization can go it alone these days. The need to provide guests with an ever-greater diversity of products, services, and experiences has led The Walt Disney Company to seek out new partners around the world.
- Finally, there is the classic service conundrum. Customer retention requires customer satisfaction, but customer satisfaction is a moving

[12] The Walt Disney Company, "Disney – Leadership, History, Corporate Social Responsibility," The Walt Disney Company, https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about.

[13] Theodore Kinni, *Be Our Guest, Perfecting the Art of Customer Service* (Glendale, CA: Disney Enterprises, Inc., 2011), xi.

> target. Customers as a whole are more demanding than ever before, and rightly so. Further, delighting the repeat quests on whom The Walt Disney Company depends for its future success means that the company must raise the bar at every customer touch point.[14]

Kinni provides an account of The Quality Service Compass, explaining how various organizations, both commercial and institutional, have utilized the Disney Institute as a resource for ideas and concepts to develop their own service strategies.

> The Quality Service Compass has four main points: guestology, quality standards, delivery systems, and integration. Our service objective – to exceed guest expectations – resides at the center of the compass.
>
> *Compass Point 1: Guestology* – Guestology is what Disney calls the art and science of knowing and understanding customers. It is the first point on the compass because the needs, wants, perceptions, and emotions of guests are the basis for the actions that take place in all of the other points. Guestology establishes an initial course of action, and as new customer information is gathered, that data is used to fine-tune and improve performance. Guestology enables organizations to provide a context for their service strategies. The context within which we seek to exceed expectations is happiness. *At Disney, we try to create happiness for people of all ages everywhere.* This common purpose is a rallying flag. Every decision is measured against. Whether a decision supports the common purpose is an important managerial litmus test.
>
> *Compass Point 2: Quality Standards* – Quality standards serve two purposes: They establish the criteria for actions that are necessary to accomplish the service strategy, and they serve as the measures of Quality Service. At the Disney resorts and parks, there are four quality standards. In order of importance, they are *safety, courtesy, show, and efficiency.*
>
> *Compass Point 3: Delivery Systems* - There are three service-delivery systems that all companies share: their employees, their setting, and their processes.
>
> *Compass Point 4: Integration* – Integration means quite simply that the three delivery systems are combined and aligned to create a complete operating system. Cast, setting, and process are merged in pursuit of the service strategy. The result: an exceptionally high-quality guest experience that drives the success of all organizations known for service excellence. Integration is a logical, step-by-step process.[15]

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[14] Kinni, *Be Our Guest, Perfecting the Art of Customer Service*, 8-10.

[15] Kinni, *Be Our Guest, Perfecting the Art of Customer Service*, 18-25.

Regarding Guestology, Kinni defines the two major kinds of information developed by guest research as demographic and psychographic, noting that:

> At Disney, demographic information is thought of as factual knowledge about our guests. Demographics mainly describe the physical attributes of a group and often comprise of quantitative data. Demographic information reveals who customers are, where they come from, how much effort they expend to get here, how much money they spend, etc. Demographics help us ensure that the Quality Service Compass is correctly centered.
>
> Psychographic information is the category of customer research data that helps Disney understand its guests' mental states. Psychographics offer clues to what customers need, what preconceived notions they bring to the table, and what emotions they experience.[16]

A biblical hospitality approach to equipping church leaders to engage the surrounding community requires creating a performance culture or culture-building. Kinni shares six tips for culture-building as insight into Disney's systematic and powerful effect on business results:

1. *Keep it simple.* Everyone must feel comfortable with the culture. Leave room for individuality and personality.

2. *Make it global.* Everyone at the site, including management, must buy in.

3. *Make it measurable.* Create specific guidelines, and make them a part of the performance-assessment process.

4. *Provide training and coaching.* Incorporate the elements of the culture into employee training and ongoing performance coaching. Encourage peer-to-peer coaching.

5. *Solicit feedback and ideas from the team.* Foster a sense of ownership, and expand the pool of creative input by allowing employees to contribute to the show.

6. *Recognize and reward performance.* Build employee motivation through formal and informal reward and recognition programs.[17]

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[16] Kinni, *Be Our Guest, Perfecting the Art of Customer Service*, 35-36.

[17] Kinni, *Be Our Guest, Perfecting the Art of Customer Service*, 83.

Recognizing the importance of including training for church leaders within the biblical hospitality model, this project aims to equip them to engage effectively with the Gethsemane Baptist Church's surrounding community. It involves developing teaching modules to facilitate this engagement process. This strategy aligns with the principles and values articulated by Doug Lipp in his book, *Disney U: How Disney University Develops the World's Most Engaged, Loyal, and Customer-Centric Employees*. Lipp discusses the Four Circumstances, or components, essential to the success of Disney University as identified by its founder, Van France:

1. *Innovate.* Leaders must be forward-thinking and comfortable with risk
2. *Support.* Leaders must provide support that overt, enthusiastic, and sustained.
3. *Educate.* Employee education and development must be an indispensable component of organizational culture, simple enough to remember and act upon, and implemented at all organizational levels.
4. *Entertain.* Employee education and development must be engaging, memorable, and fun.[18]

According to Lipp, "Walt's belief that laughter is no enemy to learning gave Van license to create training materials that transformed theory into action and the potentially boring into the memorable."[19]

The customer service discipline engages with this project from a biblical perspective by enabling the church to incorporate intentional inclusivity teachings that equip its leaders for effective ministry service. Just as Luke's Gospel vividly illustrates compassion and concern for people through a lens of inclusivity and generosity, customer

[18] Doug Lipp, *Disney U, How Disney University Develops the World's Most Engaged, Loyal, and Customer-centric Employees* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2013), 26.

[19] Lipp, *Disney U,* 26.

service introduces new ways to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and make disciples when preparing church leaders and connecting with the surrounding community. This idea is supported by The Walt Disney Company's commitment to making a meaningful and measurable impact in the community, as reflected in their statement on Impact.disney.com: "Through impactful collaborations and strategic community investments, we are helping to advance authentic representation in media and entertainment; drive economic opportunity, access, and equity in the communities in which we operate; create inclusive and respectful entertainment experiences; and empower future generations of storytellers and innovators."[20]

Church leaders must develop effective ways to communicate with the diverse cultures in their communities and demonstrate cultural representation in their media outreach efforts. Therefore, Impact Disney highlights Disney's commitment to promoting authentic representation in media and entertainment: "We are committed to reimagining tomorrow by empowering organizations that reflect the lives and experiences of the communities we serve across creative content, news, experiences, and products. We also support efforts to track industry progress toward increased representation in media and entertainment."[21]

The customer service discipline connects with the historical foundation of this project, as the biblical hospitality approach to equipping church leaders to engage with the surrounding community can be traced back to the practice of serving others and cross-

[20] Impact Disney, "Disney Social Responsibility; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Community," Impact Disney, https://impact.disney.com/diversity-equity-inclusion/commitment/.

[21] Impact Disney, "Disney Social Responsibility; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Community," Impact Disney, https://impact.disney.com/diversity-equity-inclusion/commitment/.

cultural discipleship exemplified by Jean-Henri Dunant. He was a Swiss businessman known for being a social activist and humanitarian visionary, and he is best recognized for his role in founding the Red Cross. The character and contributions of this pioneer of modern hospitality and humanitarianism are comparable to those of Walt Disney, who, according to Neal Gabler in his book, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, "reshaped the entertainment industry by building a synergistic empire that combined film, television, theme parks, music, book publishing, and merchandise in a way that was unprecedented and was later widely imitated."[22] Gabler discussed how "In numerous ways Disney struck what may be the very fundament of entertainment: the promise of a perfect world that conforms to our wishes. He achieved this in part by managing, almost purely by instinct, to tap into archetypes that resonated with people of various ages, eras, and cultures."[23]

The discipline of customer service engages with a theological foundation based on ecclesiology and discipleship, as highlighted by Millard J. Erickson in his book, *Christian Theology*. Erickson proposes several implications regarding the nature of the church. This researcher believes that understanding these implications will promote a customer service approach to ministry outreach and engagement:

1. The church is not to be conceived of primarily as a sociological phenomenon, but as a divinely established institution. Accordingly, its essence is to be determined not from an analysis of its activity, but from Scripture.

2. The church exists because of its relationship to the Triune God. It exists to carry out its Lord's will by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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[22] Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney, The Triumph of the American Imagination* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), front inside cover.

[23] Gabler, *Walt Disney,* xv.

3. The church is the continuation of the Lord's presence and ministry in the world.

4. The church is to be a fellowship of regenerate believers who display the spiritual qualities of their Lord. Purity and devotion are to be emphasized.

5. While the church is a divine creation, it is made up of imperfect human beings. It will not reach perfect sanctification or glorification until its Lord's return.[24]

Creativity has proven to be an effective core value for The Walt Disney Company. Likewise, creative approaches to discipleship are essential for engaging diverse cultures in the church and ministry. Erickson insists that "The church has been charged to carry out Christ's ministry in the world. To accomplish this, certain functions must be met. A balance of these functions is essential to the spiritual health and well-being of the body. The gospel is at the heart of the ministry of the church and is implicit in all of the functions of the church."[25] Erickson identifies these functions as evangelism, edification, worship, and social concern, concluding that "To continue its existence, it is necessary for the church to be willing to serve, be adaptable in methodology, and be adaptable to its environment."[26]

Conclusion

This study and implementation of a biblical hospitality approach to equipping church leaders for engaging the surrounding community will significantly impact this project. Just as The Walt Disney Company has developed a groundbreaking, world-

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[24] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 970.

[25] Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 971.

[26] Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 971.

renowned customer service model for individuals of all cultures, this project will focus on developing a ministry model that has the potential to create a customer service-oriented culture at Gethsemane Baptist Church. This will equip church leaders to grow in the spirit of humility in serving, highlight the importance of being hospitable to people regardless of economic, racial, and societal differences, and enhance engagement with the surrounding community.

Here are additional insights gained from the hospitality and customer service field that have shaped my understanding of this project. In his book, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Robert Schnase asserts that vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Radical Hospitality: "Their members focus on those outside their congregation with as much passion as they attend to the nurture and growth of those who already belong to the family of faith, and they apply their utmost creativity, energy, and effectiveness to the task, exceeding all expectations."[27]

The Gethsemane Baptist Church aims to develop a purpose and strategy for extending hospitality to the surrounding community. Recognizing that the church has grown comfortable fostering ministry focused on the congregation present in the pews on Sundays, this researcher believes that this project will better equip the church to engage the community in a more meaningful and intentional manner. This concept aligns with Schnase's explanation of Christian hospitality: "It describes a genuine love for others who are not yet a part of the faith community, an outward focus, a reaching out to those not yet known, a love that motivates church members to openness and adaptability, a

[27] Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 11.

willingness to change behaviors in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talents of newcomers."[28]

Peder Acadahl also supports this concept in his blog entitled "Engaging Newcomers: Strategies for Church Attraction" where he highlights discovering how relevance, relationships, hospitality, effective marketing can help kindle fresh interest in today's society — making the age-old message of faith resonate with modern lives. Here are Acadahl's key takeaways:

- Personal invitations from existing members play a crucial role in attracting new people to church, creating charisma and familiarity that mass advertising campaigns cannot replicate.
- Engaging sermon series and relevant community outreach programs can pique the interest of potential new members by addressing topics that resonate with their lives and demonstrating the church's commitment to being a valuable contributor within society.
- Creating a welcoming and inviting environment through cleanliness, organization, comfortable seating arrangements, friendly greeters, information booths, engaging visuals, music, and appropriate lighting techniques is essential in making newcomers feel valued and increasing their likelihood of returning.
- Utilizing online presence through websites, social media platforms, email newsletters, targeted online advertising can significantly increase visibility for the church within the local community while engaging with a broader audience.[29]

Acadahl also affirms that "To attract new people to church, it is crucial to identify specific needs in the community, create a welcoming and inviting environment, utilize online presence and digital marketing, as well as host community events and

[28] Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, 11-12.

[29] Peder Acadahl, "Engaging Newcomers: Strategies for Church Attraction," Marketing Church, https://marketing.church/engaging-newcomers-strategies-for-church-attraction/.

outreach programs."[30] Acadahl shares these examples of identifying specific needs in the community:

> For example, if you live in an area with a high population of young families, you might consider offering parenting workshops or children's activities as part of your church programming.
>
> Similarly, if there is a lack of social connections or a sense of isolation within the community, organizing events such as neighborhood barbecues or game nights can help foster relationships among residents.
>
> By identifying specific needs in the community, you can show potential attendees how your church is relevant and committed to meeting those needs.[31]

Brian Dodd provided the following "25 Tips For Churches On Delivering Better Customer Service" that he gleaned from The Zappos Experience:

1. Collaboration Is A Competitive Advantage – "The spirit of a collaborative and diverse corporate culture still offers Zappos a strong competitive advantage."

2. Leverage Mistakes As A Tool For Learning – "The one thing that I think Zappos has done really well is to have a culture where you try new things, make mistakes, minimize the costs of those mistakes, but learn from them so that you don't make the same mistakes again." – Former COO and CFO Alfred Lin

3. Treating People Right Is A Long-Term Strategy – "The Zappos story is rich with examples of its leaders thinking beyond the short-term profits of the company and targeting what they believe is right for their customers now and into the future."

4. Leaders Should Not Feel Self-Important – "Tony (Hsieh) and the other leaders have always treated us as equals. We are all Zappos. Leaders have never been too self-important to pick orders or to run across the warehouse so the customer's item makes it on the leadership truck. We follow the leadership's example of dedicated effort." – Zappos employee Rhonda Ford

5. Feelings Determine Behavior – Hsieh said, "Values are not what we put on paper; they're what people do and how they feel doing it." Michelli adds,

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[30] Peder Acadahl, "Engaging Newcomers: Strategies for Church Attraction," Marketing Church, https://marketing.church/engaging-newcomers-strategies-for-church-attraction/.

[31] Peder Acadahl, "Engaging Newcomers: Strategies for Church Attraction," Marketing Church, https://marketing.church/engaging-newcomers-strategies-for-church-attraction/.

"From the inception of the company, Zappos leadership understood the importance of feelings in determining behavior."

6. Happy Employees Deliver Better Customer Service – "It is leadership understanding that fun helps to get things done and that happy employees give so much more…The fact that I can come to work and have fun is central to the quality of my life." – employee Mary Johnson

7. Consistent Execution Differentiates You From The World – "It is consistent execution that differentiates a Zappos from other well-meaning yet average businesses or mediocre individual service providers."

8. Bad Hires Cost You Significant Attendance And Money – "You must seek staff members who suit your culture…One of the key elements in Zappos success has been its leadership's uncanny ability to bring together a team of like-minded employees who are dedicated to common goals and objectives." It is also noted that "Tony Hsieh believes that bad hiring has cost Zappos more than $100 million.

9. Make Things At Your Church Easy And Reliable – "The customers valued not only the selection (of shoes) and ease of use, but also service reliability."

10. Spend Time Socially With Your Employees – "Managers are asked to spend at least 10 to 20 percent of their time outside the office with their employees." – Zappos recruiting supervisor Brandis Paden

11. Every Staff Member Should Spend Significant Time With People – "This leader, like all other new hires, was required to go through four weeks of customer service training."

12. Senior Staff Should Do Some "Grunt" Work – "Leaders are also expected to encounter the joys and challenges of serving customers in the call center environment."

13. Your Church's Reputation Matters – "(Your) brand is a lagging indicator of culture." – Hsieh

14. Create WOW Experiences For Those Who Attend Your Church – "The first step in that pursuit (creating a 'WOW' experience) is achieved by making sure you are simply 'getting it right' (delivering exactly what customers want the first time you serve them) and 'making it easy' (reducing the overall effort required for customers to get their needs met)."

15. Exceed Expectations For Those Attending Your Church – "Customers can be 'wowed' if the business exceeds their expectations and/or offers personalized care."

16. Listen To Those Who Attend Your Church – “The Zappos user experience (UX) team relies on a combination of active listening, user research, intuition, and trial-and-error approaches.”

17. Your Best Ideas On How To Deliver Ministry Come From Those Who Sit In Your Seats Every Week – “The best ideas come from customers.”

18. Help People Get What They Want And Need – “When considering what it takes to help customers make knowledgeable decisions, leaders should think about offering guidance as a long-term investment. The more you assist your customers in getting what they want, the more those customers will turn to you as a trusted advisor for future products and services.”

19. Offer Those Attending Your Church Something Extra – “Often the difference between okay service and great service is a matter of executing on the basics and offering a slight extra that makes a customer go ‘wow.'”

20. Hire Staff Who Are Passionate About Your Mission And Vision – “A lot of companies will hire applicants largely based on their education level. They’ll hire MBA’s because of the skills those individuals probably acquired during their education. We, on the other hand, will hire primarily based on the passions of the individuals, and then we will teach them to do what we need them to do.” – Aaron Magness, senior director of Brand Marketing and Business Development

21. Make A Personal Connection With Your People – “I am convinced that customers will say ‘wow’ in response to service in two basic circumstances: 1. When you exceed their expectations. 2. When you make a personal emotional connection with them.”

22. Invite Feedback From Your Congregation – “In a time when many businesses seek to establish and perform at an adequate level of service expectations, Zappos seeks out a higher level of criticism.”

23. Elevate Your Expectations – “As you set higher service standards, you must accept the challenge of elevated expectations. The fruits of business success exist on those higher branches of excellence.”

24. Unite Generations For Kingdom Purpose – “Business can be, and increasingly must be, about the development of personal relationships that span a customer’s lifetime. While average managers might think a company can thrive simply by selling goods or services to customers, true leaders understand that all business is personal.”

25. Customer Centric Churches Often Have More Money To Do More Ministry – “Companies that truly allow staff members to take care of the best interests of

customers enjoy, on average, more than 20 percent greater profits than those that operate from a less customer-centric perspective."[32]

[32] Brian Dodd, "Twenty-Five Tips For Churches On Delivering Better Customer Service," Brian Dodd on Leadership, https://briandoddonleadership.com/2016/06/06/25-tips-for-churches-on-delivering-better-customer-service/.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Based on my pastoral experience, I have observed a growing pattern in which neighborhood churches are increasingly losing authentic connection with the communities they reside in. This disconnection is attributed to the effects of gentrification, which has significantly changed the demographics from what was once familiar communities. As economic, racial, and cultural dynamics continue to shift the local community, the neighborhood church increasingly finds itself unprepared and ill-equipped to engage the community in intentional and meaningful ways, limiting its ability to form authentic connections, diminishing its capacity to effectively identify community needs. This project is rooted in my lived experiences of continual relocation during my formative years, limiting my exposure to sustained belonging, as well as my pastoral observation of an increasing pattern of disconnection between neighborhood churches and communities they are called to serve.

The disruption of the authentic connection between the surrounding community and the neighborhood church is clear within the context of Gethsemane Baptist Church. This lack of connection is not the result of unwillingness but of unintentionality and insufficient education and training. Noah Young asserts in his blog entitled “Eight Key Elements of Effective Church Leadership Training that” “Trained leaders are better

prepared to implement strategies that promote church growth, both spiritually and numerically. They can effectively engage with members, address their spiritual questions, and mobilize the congregation for community service and evangelism."[1]
This outward focus not only enriches the lives of church members but also extends the church's influence and positive impact within the broader community.

Like many historically black congregations across the country, Gethsemane continues to operate from ministry patterns built for a demographic landscape that no longer exists. This project, therefore, seeks to address the central question: How can Gethsemane Baptist Church cultivate a biblically grounded, theologically formed, and practically sustainable hospitality model that connects the congregation to the community in which it resides? Therefore, the synergy between my personal narrative, the church's history, and the community's demographic shifts makes this question not merely academic but pastoral and missional.

The biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations discussed in the previous chapters collectively shaped the development of this project. The exegetical analysis of Luke 14:7-14 informed the biblical bases for hospitality by demonstrating Jesus' reframe of the narrative as an expression of humility, justice, and inclusion. In the historical foundation, Jean Henri Dunant showed a compelling example of genuine non-biased hospitality rooted in compassion and human dignity. The theological foundations highlighted the essential roles of ecclesiology and discipleship that were necessary in the formation and development of this biblical hospitality model. Finally, the interdisciplinary foundations illustrated how the principles of the non-church

[1] Noah Young, "Eight Key Elements of Effective Church Leadership Training," Teach Flor, https://www.teachfloor.com/blog/church-leadership-training.

customer service practices of Disney influenced this project. The convergence of these foundations influenced the development of a hospitality model that would equip the leaders of Gethsemane Baptist Church in a more intentional way to effectively engage the surrounding community.

The biblical foundation module of this project taught through a biblical lens the importance of inclusivity, which changed the social and religious norms of what hospitality was in that time. Jesus exposes the misuse of hospitality by pointing out that it was commonly used for self-promotion and social advancement, which challenged the social hierarchy regarding seating and invitational practices. Jesus gives a vision of inclusivity by inviting the marginalized, poor, crippled, and lame…those who could not reciprocate the invitation. This passage brings picturesque biblical clarity of true hospitality, and at the same time critiques contemporary church hospitality, which mirrors modern-day cultural values.

The historical foundation module taught the importance of inclusivity and cross-cultural discipleship that goes beyond humanitarianism to biblical hospitality. These principles are drawn from the life of Jean Henri Dunant. Dunant was selected as the historical figure because he is the embodiment of biblically mandated hospitality. With his religious upbringing as a Calvinist, he believed in the importance of showing compassion to anyone in need and sharing the Gospel. Dunant demonstrated his conviction at the Battle of Solferino in 1859. When the battle was over, Dunant organized aid for the soldiers of both sides of the war regardless of nationality or religion, utilizing the slogan “tutti Fratelli” (All are brothers), which embodied what he believed as universal human dignity. In our contemporary churches, as demonstrated by Dunant’s

historic example and conviction, there is a great need to move from conviction to authentic compassion and disciple-making.

The theological foundation module was designed to educate the leaders of Gethsemane Baptist Church to understand the true nature of the church, the engagement as a disciple, and the making of disciples cross-culturally, all of which are essential components of the biblical hospitality model. This module will examine the theology of ecclesiology and discipleship that will offer a unique opportunity to become a transformational church, build meaningful relationships, practice cross-cultural hospitality, and emerge prepared to engage the surrounding community.

The interdisciplinary foundations module examined a non-church related hospitality model of The Walt Disney Company, demonstrating its dedication to the culture of belonging. This comparative study gave an understanding of excellence in hospitality and how these same principles applied to a ministry context. This module illustrated key hospitality strategies that informed and equipped the leaders of Gethsemane with practical ways to engage and cultivate relationships with the surrounding community, building relationships and creating meaningful experiences.

Methodology

Problem Statement

As communities across the country have shifted demographically for various reasons, including gentrification, the neighborhood church has lost its connection with the community in which it resides. While the community has experienced growth and

revitalization, the neighborhood church has shown a lack of intentionality in demonstrating hospitality and welcoming newcomers. This absence of intentionality has led to churches that are unaware of the community's needs, resulting in an inability to create a hospitality model that fosters connections for further evangelistic and discipleship efforts. Gethsemane Baptist Church is currently facing this issue, struggling to connect and make a spiritual impact on the community due to the demographic changes brought about by gentrification. The concept of gentrification is explained by Jordan McCray in his thesis entitled "Gentrification and the Black Church: Mitigating Black Suburban Displacement in a Post COVID-19 World" as follows:

> Black churches have been playing an important, stabilizing and supportive role for their members, their neighborhoods, and their communities more broadly. However, these churches' memberships, community functions, and abilities to support their members have been threatened by the accelerating displacement of African Americans due to the ongoing effects of gentrification, defined by massive economic investment in low-income areas leading to the displacement of low-income residents.[2]

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this project is if the leaders of Gethsemane Baptist Church participate in an intentional biblical hospitality journey aimed toward increasing a spirit of humility in serving, illuminating the importance of being hospitable to people regardless of economic, racial, societal differences, and enhancing community engagement, then leaders will be equipped to engage the surrounding community.

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[2] Jordan McCray, "Gentrification and the Black Church: Mitigating Black Suburban Displacement in a Post COVID-19 World" (2021), Theses and Dissertations—Geography, 78.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip leaders from the church and community to engage the surrounding community with humility. The project also sought to present an alternative perspective to the traditional understanding of hospitality, inviting a biblical Christ-centered interpretation of hospitality as a theological mandate.

Project Design and Participation

Professional Associates were regularly consulted on project design, methodology, and implementation. Peer Associates served as accountability partners. Context Associates provided administrative support and assisted with data collection. The project plan consisted of nine participants: four men and four women from ages twenty-eight to sixty-seven. The project was designed for six sessions over six consecutive weeks, five ninety-minute training sessions with a fifteen-minute break, and a final session that was designated as a fun day designed for reflection and fellowship, where the participants could share their experiences during this project. The selected representation was intentionally aimed toward cultivating a setting where a breadth of experiences and unique perspectives would enrich dialogue.

The project had an apparent impact on the participants as reflected during the training sessions related to the four foundations, weekly journal prompts, discussions, and as they shared in the closing fellowship. The sessions followed the same format:

1. Opening Prayer
2. Reflections on the weekly Journal Prompt
3. Teaching Module

4. Closing Discussion
5. Assignment of weekly Journal Prompt
6. Closing Prayer

The Collection of Data

A qualitative research methodology was used to explore how participants responded in an intentional biblical hospitality journey that would equip the leaders and community members at Gethsemane Baptist Church to engage the surrounding community. This qualitative approach was appropriate because the project sought to capture the lived experiences of the participants, reflections, and a comprehensive understanding of biblical hospitality and cultural discipleship in a spirit of humility. The primary data collected for this project were from pre-test and post-test surveys of participants, group discussions, and participant journal entries.

The model of inquiry was phenomenological in design because it would describe the essence of the participants' experiences as they engaged in the sessions, discussions, and practices of biblical hospitality. This approach aligned perfectly with the project's purpose of examining the internal transformation and relational engagement rather than measuring the behavioral outcomes alone.

Implementation

Participants and Setting

The project consisted of nine participants intentionally selected to represent leaders in ministry, various age groups and backgrounds, and members of the surrounding community who have a desire to serve in church and community. The selection included six church leaders and two community members. The project took place over six weeks (September 21, 2025 – October 26, 2025). The sessions were conducted at Gethsemane Baptist Church. The experience, titled "Biblical Hospitality: An Equipping Model for Community Engagement," is a journey that emphasizes hospitality as a lived practice that goes beyond the church settings.

The equipping teaching modules consisted of six weekly sessions, each integrating prayer, group discussion, reflection, and experiential learning. Teaching modules addressed the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations that informed the premise of biblical hospitality and discipleship, with Luke 14:7-14 serving as the central biblical text. Prior to the first session, participants were informed of the purpose and scope of the project. The emphasis was placed on intentional journey rather than performance, growth rather than perfection, and humility rather than expertise. This framing helped establish an environment where participants felt invited to be open, reflective, and engaged. During the first session, the pre-test survey was administered, allowing the participants to articulate their understanding of hospitality, humility, cross-cultural discipleship, and community engagement.

Structure of the Biblical Hospitality Journey

Biblical Foundations of Hospitality

The first session focused on establishing the biblical foundations of hospitality by engaging in Luke 14:7-14 as the primary text. The researcher guided the participants through Jesus' teaching of hospitality as a spiritual discipline rooted in humility that would invite those who are disenfranchised, poor, or who cannot repay. This discipline resists the temptation of seeking reciprocity, honor, status, or comfort, which is a direct contradiction to the societal norm of its time. This biblical mandate of hospitality in the text highlights the inclusive nature of the kingdom of God. This instruction challenged the participants' understanding of the traditional view of hospitality, engaging the prevailing cultural norms, biases, and traditions while reframing hospitality as a biblical mandate that is less about self-interest and more about serving the community. Upon the conclusion of the session, the participants were then given a journal prompt inviting them to reflect on their understanding of biblical hospitality and how it can be demonstrated by church leaders.

Historical Foundations and Cross-Cultural Discipleship

The second session, which built on the biblical foundations module of hospitality, examined the historical practice of hospitality within the Christian tradition by investigating the life and character of Jean Henri Dunant, highlighting the active

witness of cross-cultural discipleship. His life and upbringing demonstrated an emphasis on hospitality by the intentional selfless care for foreigners, the stranger, the traveler, and the marginalized.

Participants reflected on the life of Dunant, highlighting the historical expressions of hospitality and countercultural sacrifice he embodied. The session invited the participants to truly examine how cultural norms, societal biases, and material comfort can hinder hospitality in contemporary church contexts. This session's discussion centered on serving others across cultural lines and recognizing hospitality as a bridge for formative discipleship rather than a hindrance to community connection.

Theological Foundations and the Nature of the Church

The theological foundations primarily focused on in week three were investigating the true nature of the church, pointing out the importance of discipleship. The researcher emphasized that hospitality is not peripheral to discipleship but central to the church's identity and mission. The participants were encouraged to explore the calling of the church to show hospitality reflecting the character of Christ through humility, service, and presence.

Upon careful reflection, the participants were challenged to examine the practices of Gethsemane or churches in general as to whether they communicate welcome or exclusion, presence or distance. The journal prompts invited participants also to reflect on the purpose of the church and their own personal journey of discipleship, reinforcing the connection between genuine hospitality and spiritual formation.

Interdisciplinary Foundations and the Disney Model of Hospitality

In this fourth session, the interdisciplinary foundations introduced hospitality in a non-church centered approach, which gives particular attention to the Disney Corporation's model of hospitality. This model was used as a practical lens for examining intentionality, excellence, consistency, and the inclusive guest experience. Participants explored how Disney places its focus on anticipation, attention to detail, and inclusive experiences that could inform the church's approach to inclusive and accommodating hospitality without compromising its theological convictions. The discussion in this session emphasized that the church could effectively gain hospitality practices in other sectors while its spiritual mission remains in place. The Disney model provides a language of hospitality and framework in considering how people experience welcome, care, and a sense of belonging. Participants were encouraged to reflect on how church environments, communication, and interactions may shape perceptions of trust and safety, whether positively or negatively.

The researcher emphasized that the church's hospitality model must go beyond efficiency or excellence and remain rooted in biblical Christ-centered service. The goal was not to entertain but to engage, not to impress but to invite. It is imperative that the church should lead the call to extend hospitality across cultural differences and welcome with intentionality the marginalized, poor, and the excluded, which is the theme of the previous foundations.

Integration, Reflection, and Assessment

The fifth session of the project focused on integration and reflection. The participants revisited key themes from the previous sessions and reflected on the shared insights from their journal entries. In this session, the post-test survey was administered, allowing the participants to articulate their understanding of hospitality, humility, cross-cultural discipleship, and community engagement, revealing the growth and development over the course of their project journey. The discussions during this session revealed an increased awareness of the need for intentional hospitality, garnered a greater sensitivity to cultural and societal differences, and produced a deeper understanding of hospitality as a form of discipleship.

Experiential Hospitality and Community Engagement

The sixth session was our Family Fun Day, held at a local restaurant and it was open to participants and their families. This event served as an experiential expression of the hospitality principles explored throughout the project. Participants shared a fellowship meal and engaged in insightful conversation which created a space for meaningful relationship building and trust.

During this time together, the participants were invited to share the experiences they encountered during this project and provided an opportunity to offer feedback on how the church could better engage and serve the community. It was in this moment that the project's core values were embodied by evoking an environment of inclusivity, attentive listening, presence, and mutual respect.

Week One

Opening Prayer

Meet and Greet; Introductions; Project Overview – 20 minutes

Administer Pre-test Surveys – 20 minutes

Introduce Weekly Prompted Journaling Process – 10 minutes

Module One Teaching/Handout – The essential need of hospitality from the people of God to the community. Luke 14:7-14 (Biblical Foundations) - 30 minutes

Closing Discussion and Assigning Weekly Journal Prompt (What is biblical hospitality and how can it be demonstrated by church leaders?) – 10 minutes

Closing Prayer

Week Two

Opening Prayer

Moments of Sharing (Reflections on the Weekly Journal Entry) - 30 minutes

Module Two Teaching/Handout –The practice of serving others and cross-cultural discipleship. (Historical Foundations) - 30 minutes

Closing Discussion on Teaching; Questions and Answers – 20 minutes

Assigning Weekly Journal Prompt (How can I better serve others? What is my understanding of cross-cultural discipleship?) - 10 minutes

Closing Prayer

Week Three

Opening Prayer

Moments of Sharing (Reflections on the Weekly Journal Entry) - 30 minutes

Module Three Teaching/Handout – Understanding the church. Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. (Theological Foundations) - 30 minutes

Closing Discussion on Teaching; Questions and Answers – 20 minutes

Assigning Weekly Journal Prompt (What is the purpose of the church? How can I become a disciple of Jesus Christ?) - 10 minutes

Closing Prayer

Week Four

Opening Prayer

Moments of Sharing (Reflections on the Weekly Journal Entry) - 30 minutes

Module Four Teaching/Handout – Demonstrating hospitality in the church and in the community (Interdisciplinary Foundations) - 30 minutes

Closing Discussion on Teaching; Questions and Answers – 20 minutes

Assigning Weekly Journal Prompt (How is the church treating me in a hospitable manner? How is the church engaging me to attend worship services and outreach events? – 10 minutes

Closing Prayer

Week Five

Opening Prayer

Moments of Sharing (Reflections on the Weekly Journal Entry) - 30 minutes

Recap of Module Teachings - 20 minutes

Closing Discussion on Teachings; Questions and Answers – 10 minutes

Administer Post-test Surveys – 30 minutes

Closing Prayer

Week Six: Family Fun Day (project participants and families; outdoor location to be determined)

Serve/Bless Food and Eat – 30 minutes

Participants Share Their Project Experience and How They Can Be Engaged by the Church – 20 minutes

Closing Remarks; Thank you! – 10 minutes

Fun and Games!! – 60 minutes

Closing Prayer

Project Data Collected

A pre-test survey was administered at the beginning of the first module on the first day of the project (Appendix A). At the conclusion of module five a post-test (Appendix B) was administered. The surveys were open-ended questions to ascertain the participants thoughtful and comprehensive understanding if biblical hospitality, cross cultural discipleship and community engagement. The data collected from the pre- and post-test surveys is in Appendix C. The participants recorded their weekly journal prompt responses in the provided journals that reflected on the session content and personal

experiences. The collection of this data will provide insight as to the extent of personal growth and spiritual formation throughout this journey which will be referenced in the summary within this chapter.

Conclusion

The discussions were guided by questions that were incorporated into each training session. Responses of the participants were recorded during and monitored by the researcher and Context Associate. These discussions served as an additional data source, capturing spontaneous reactions, shared narratives, comprehension and practical application as participants engaged the instruction on hospitality and discipleship. The dialogue proved to be rich and insightful.

The use of multiple qualitative data collection methods which include the pre- and post-test surveys, journaling, and guided discussions the project captured both reflective and experiential participant responses. This approach provided a holistic framework for a comprehensive examination of how an intentional biblical hospitality journey fostered spiritual formation and equipped leaders and community members to engage the surrounding community.

The implementation of this project emerged out of pastoral awareness that Gethsemane Baptist Church was no longer fully connected to the community in which it resides. Demographic shifts caused by gentrification had altered the surrounding neighborhood, yet the church's practices, posture, and engagement strategies had remained largely unchanged. The researcher approached the implementation of this project not as a program to be added, but as a formative equipping model. Its aim was to

reorient the leaders of Gethsemane and community members toward Christ centered biblical hospitality as a way of serving, and discipling with humility that transcends economic, racial, and societal differences.

By the conclusion of the project, the participants increased their understanding of the mandate for Biblical Hospitality along with supporting foundations that substantiate it. One participant said that they "see hospitality in an entirely different way especially in light of cross-cultural discipleship." The participants now view the ministries they serve through the lens of Biblical Hospitality which highlights the need to be inclusive regardless of a person's background, race, economic or societal or cultural differences in and outside of the church. I would say from the enlightened responses and the enthusiastically rich dialogue, the project was a huge success. The implementation process of combining the biblical, historical, theological and interdisciplinary foundations strengthened my hypothesis regarding a Biblical Hospitality equipping model.

Summary of Learnings

Project Reflections

The results of the data revealed that nine leaders and congregants of the Gethsemane Baptist Church are equipped for community engagement as a result of being guided through a six-week biblical hospitality experience focused on increasing a spirit of humility in serving, illuminating the importance of being hospitable to all, regardless of economic, racial, and societal differences, and improving engagement with the

surrounding community. The effectiveness of this model can be attributed to the Professional Associates, Context Associates, training module, and the researcher.

This researcher and project participants learned from several research tools utilized during this project. Specifically, this researcher relied heavily on data received via pre-test surveys and post-test surveys to help track participants' growing understanding of what biblical hospitality is and express a newly developed level of comfort in engaging the surrounding community. The researcher employed group discussions and journal prompts that allowed the participants to articulate their personal insights, spiritual formation, and evolving perspectives that demonstrated the depth of understanding which was enjoyable to watch as they shared their understanding with excitement.

The Professional Associates and Context Associate were a great help assisting the researcher with this project. They understood the passion behind the subject matter to this project. The Professional Associates served in a consultant capacity assisting the researcher to evaluate the material and offering practical insight that strengthened the overall project. Their involvement encouraged the researcher with needed follow-up and sharing of their expertise, offering guidance to ensure the project remained aligned with the overall purpose. The Context Associate also served an essential role assisting the researcher in the administration of the pre- and post-tests and ensuring that project related materials were distributed and collected. They were on time and attentive to what was needed in that moment insuring the success of the project implementation.

Analysis of Data

The participant accomplishments confirm the success of this project as indicated in the report below of major findings, which are related to each project goal: Major Finding #1 – More church leaders and congregants have increased their spirit of humility in serving after attending the training sessions at the Gethsemane Baptist Church.

First Data Exemplar – In support of this finding when the participants were asked the question on the pre-test and post-test surveys, "What is your understanding of humility in serving?" most responses revealed that the project helped more church leaders and congregants understand what serving in humility means. This finding also revealed that participants believe the church can do more to not give the impression of being "better" Christians, provide unconditional service that matches that of Jesus, serve with love, and put the needs of others before their own.

One participant responded, "Humility is being able to not judge: to put your own agenda aside. Go beyond the walls to serve." Another participant responded, "If I'm being honest, not always. I do feel I operate more on the humility side vs the other. But oftentimes I can focus on how I think it should be or get caught up in thinking why should I be the only one doing it." This presents this researcher with the opportunity to continue with training, teaching, and fellowship activities.

Second Data Exemplar - In support of this finding the participants' discussions and journal entries revealed an enhanced understanding of humility and biblical hospitality which surpassed the basic surface level conceptions of hospitality of having a smile and being friendly. The responses clearly expressed a Christ-centered articulation of hospitality as showing the love God with a level of inclusivity in a spirit of humility,

sacrificial care and servitude regardless of ethnicity, economic or cultural differences. The participants' responses revealed a growing clarity of hospitality being about caring and serving without reciprocity or social obligation.

The emerging responses showed that invitation and welcoming should be rooted in the love of Christ, especially toward those that are the disenfranchised, marginalized people who are often excluded. The responses revealed that true Biblical Hospitality serves everyone equally. One participant stated regarding creating a welcoming environment they emphasized that everyone should be made to feel "welcomed, part of something special, and valued," recognizing that each person is special and deserves quality treatment. The focus in churches should be to ensure that "every guest matters regardless of their differences," building supportive environments for different people in the community.

Major Finding #2 - More church leaders and congregants understand the importance of being hospitable to all, regardless of economic, racial, and societal differences after attending the training sessions at the Gethsemane Baptist Church.

First Data Exemplar – In support of this finding when the participants were asked this question on the pre-test and post-test survey, "What is your understanding of Biblical Hospitality?", the majority of responses revealed that the project encouraged more church leaders and congregants to think beyond having a presence in the community for the sole purpose of just bringing people in, but being more concerned about how to reach out and not expecting anything is return.

Participant responses included, "Being kind and welcome those in need." "My understanding of Biblical Hospitality is that it all starts with genuine relationship with

Christ. Then from there we must demonstrate Christ-like love toward all margins of people. Not only looking out for the people who can repay but more importantly the ones who can't" and "It is rooted in humility and love. It is to be of service without expectation of getting something or a desire to be seen."

In response to the question "Why is it important for the church to be hospitable to people regardless of economic, racial and societal differences?", the pre- and post-test results were similar, the consensus basically being "It's important for the church to be hospitable to people regardless of economic, racial and societal differences because it reflects the love of Christ through us (the church), who we are. Showing love and grace."

Second Data Exemplar - In support of this finding the participants' discussions went overtime and journal entries became extensive regarding inclusivity and equality because of the state of the country with deportations of immigrants that have not caused any harm. It was expressed that although the biblical mandate calls for believers to extend hospitality to everyone including those that cannot or will not reciprocate, the participants acknowledge the difficulty involved in practicing this hospitality especially toward those whose attitudes and behaviors are influenced racism and division. The participants' understanding, although racial division and prejudice prevent a genuine welcoming, the believer is still mandated to show hospitality.

What also emerged from the discussion was the challenges that the church faces as social barriers within. One participant pointed out that "churches have embedded in them cliques and exclusive groups that when seen can cause an unwelcoming atmosphere." Another challenge a participant shared is "age group segregation that limits cross-generational connections."

Major Finding #3 - Church leaders and congregants have identified specific ways to improve engagement with the surrounding community after attending the training sessions at the Gethsemane Baptist Church.

First Data Exemplar – In support of this finding when the participants were asked these questions on the pre-test and post-test survey, "How can the church become more effective in inviting people in the surrounding community to church?" "How can the church make people feel welcome when they come to the church?" "What can church leaders do to encourage biblical hospitality in the church?" and "What outreach/community events would you like the church to sponsor?", the majority of responses revealed that the church leaders and congregants appreciated being asked for their input, felt empowered when asked to identify specific ways to improve engagement with the surrounding community, and gladly shared their ideas, while others were more limited in their creativity and flexibility.

Participant responses included, "Meet and greet. Knowing what is needed to bring them into the church." "The church can become more effective in inviting people around the community to church by going outside the walls of the church. Getting to know others, inviting them to church." "Not calling them visitors. Acknowledging them. Making them feel loved and belonged. Reaching out during the week to check on them – a call or email" and "By being kind to them, not looking them up and down. Acknowledging them and maybe have some sort of Welcome gift."

When asked "How can the church better engage people of different cultures?" participant responses included "Being open-minded to other styles of worship." "By being willing to change and accept other ways. Ex. Types of music; Not judging people,"

and “Step out of our comfort zones. We need to stop making our own preferences as the priority and instead seek to do the will of God. We must be more open-minded and less judgmental. We also must do things in an orderly, consistent, and timely manner.” These responses present this researcher with the opportunity to be more creative and innovative with leadership training, ministry practices, and community events.

Participants demonstrated a good understanding of discipleship and confidence in being a disciple, as evidenced by their answers to the following question: “What is your understanding of discipleship?” “Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?” and “How do you make disciples of Jesus Christ?” Responses included “My understanding of discipleship is living as His follower, being more Christ-like.” “Yes, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.” “Offering people the Word of God. Showing them a lifestyle with your actions.” and “I make disciples of Jesus Christ by building relationships with others, loving them, and live like Him.”

Participants understood from this project the importance of gaining the trust of church members and people in the surrounding community to engage them. When asked these questions, “Do you trust the church? Why or why not?” and “What can the church do to gain your trust?,” several responses reflected a lack of trust of people in the church. Responses included “Exhibit the qualities of the Bible and of Jesus’s life here on earth.” “Living out what is taught is a way to gain my trust in the church, regardless of education, background, etc.” and “Operate more out of genuine love than from a place of money-seeking or self-serving.” This presents the researcher with the opportunity for more teachings on Christian living, church transparency, genuine hospitality, and inclusion.

When asked, “Do you feel equipped to engage the surrounding community? Why or why not?” Pre-test and post-test responses revealed that most participants overwhelmingly felt that they were better equipped to engage the surrounding community after participating in this project. The following sample responses reflect the consensus of all participants:

Participant One Pre-test response – “I do not feel comfortable or equipped to engage in community activities or events as a representative of GBC.” Post-test response - “After our meetings and review of the related materials and topics, I felt a stronger and a more intentional need to be more accepting of others and to fellowship with those that I would not normally share a circle with.”

Participant Two Pre-test response – “I feel like biblical Hospitality is important for our local churches and communities. But I don’t feel equipped because of my lack of understanding. I’m hoping that through this course I will gain a better understanding of Biblical Hospitality and the roll I play in it.” Post-test response - “Yes, I feel better equipped to engage the surrounding community with Biblical Hospitality. Knowing that Biblical Hospitality is not a standard set by man rather by God, that helps me to know it’s all about His character and attributes that need to be shown. Just like Disney, how they offer an extensive hospitality training, I feel that it is important for our local churches as well so that our community can all be on the same page.”

Participant Four Pre-test response – “As we enter into this project, I would say not really; that I have some basic knowledge of how to engage the surrounding community however I do not have a full understanding of the biblical principles that guide us in a Christ like manner in ways to serve and meet the needs of the community within the

church and outside of the church." Post-test response - "After participating in this project, I would say that I feel better equipped. The opportunity to learn and engage with the other participants offered greater insight into the true meaning of hospitality and having a servants heart. Some of the ways to show that I am better equipped would begin with the passion behind showing hospitality. I have complete buy in to the importance of serving others and creating a space for the unseen."

Participant Six Pre-test response – "I don't feel I am equipped. I mean I have been out witnessing before when I was younger, but I felt like they were pressuring instead of showing how God really is …I also didn't fully know how to engage … it has always been kinda intimidating. I also felt like I had to be on some kind of level with God before I engaged people … just being honest." Post-test response - "I can confidently say that I feel significantly better equipped to engage with the surrounding community. The project has truly broadened my perspective and deepened my understanding of what biblical hospitality entails. Previously, I might have primarily associated hospitality with welcoming people into a church setting or my home. However, this study has profoundly clarified that true biblical hospitality extends far beyond those traditional boundaries."

Second Data Exemplar - In support of this finding, systematic church challenges were identified and addressed in participant discussions and journal entries. One of the problems that a participant stated in the discussion was the church's lack of desire to network or engage first-time visitors, "new faces." There are insufficient welcoming practices for first-time visitors. There is a tendency to serve or engage those who are familiar or, as the participant stated, "look or act like us, there are barriers that prevent others from being genially accepted." This participant pointed out that some church

leaders “focus more on titles and having the place honor rather than serving in the capacity they are a leader in. Unfortunately, some of us lack the humility to extend hospitality because of being financially secure.”

The same participant expressed the extreme need to show Biblical Hospitality as shown in our focus text, Luke chapter fourteen. The text “convicted her to do better and be a better example showing hospitality to those not only in the church but her community with humility. Because everyone has value and are special to God.”

As the participants engaged in the sessions and discussion, expanded cultural awareness became evident, and the proverbial light was lit. There was an expressed consensus that the teaching helped recognize the need to confront personal biases and to step out of comfort zones. The participants identified concrete steps to make the change by having intentional conversations and prayer. Participants began to see Biblical Hospitality as a bridge-building across racial, economic, and cultural divisions. The understanding shifted to embrace those who “cannot repay” rather than serving only those who are familiar and can give back in return.

Participants’ discussions and journal entries about specific ways to improve engagement with the surrounding community evolved into what further steps can be taken in ministry integration. At this point, toward the end of session five, when we were reviewing the sessions, participants were going back and forth about how to implement hospitality. One participant stated, “it’s time for me and other leaders to loosen up and be more friendly and create spaces where people feel loved and welcomed regardless of differences.” Another participant was fired up and expressed, “regardless of the racial and cultural divisions in this country, it’s time to confront it and meet it head on with Biblical

Hospitality and focus on our commonalities." Collectively, after connecting with Disney's approach, many participants emphasized making personal connections so that everyone will feel seen, heard, and included. Participants understood that, as they were seeking ways to implement Biblical Hospitality, it required intentional effort by all leaders to create an atmosphere where everyone feels at home.

My hypothesis was supported by this project by addressing the problem of the surrounding community experiencing growth, revitalization, and gentrification, while the church lacks in intentionally demonstrating hospitality and welcoming newcomers. This absence of intentionality has led to the church being unaware of the community's needs, resulting in an inability to create a hospitality model that fosters connections for further evangelistic and discipleship efforts.

Conclusion

This project brought a level of excitement, personal reflection, and conviction. The participants who were leaders in the church and the community conveyed that this project is much needed and expressed a desire for the project to be taught in the church and in the community. This project was designed to equip leaders to become better disciples of Christ by demonstrating biblical hospitality while engaging the surrounding community. The integration of the project's foundations presented a cohesive understanding of biblical hospitality from a biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary perspective. The exegetical exploration of the gospel of Luke 14:7-14 illustrated a picturesque view of biblical hospitality. The historical example of Jean Henri Dunant embodied biblical hospitality through his life of serving. The theological

foundation informs that the church's purpose through discipleship is intertwined with biblical hospitality. The last foundation, the interdisciplinary foundation, provided a practical non-church framework of hospitality that can be used in a church context.

The current climate further indicates the need for community and a relationship with God. I was ecstatic to hear and see the excitement the participants had in this equipping hospitality journey. I felt an overwhelming privilege to be used in leading this project. The project went well, although the participants were a little apprehensive initially because of not know what to expect. The findings in the chapter revealed that the participants had a meaningful experience that showed tremendous growth in understanding hospitality practically and theologically. There was increased awareness of the systemic, cultural, and societal barriers to hospitality that the church faces. While, realistically, in this day and age, there is anger, fear, loneliness, and depression, there is a clarion call for the church to answer the mandate to show Biblical Hospitality, demonstrated through cross-cultural discipleship in a spirit of humility that transcends injustice, inequality, and exclusion.

The synergy of my spiritual autobiography, contextual analysis, and the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary informed my project. It is my lived experience of constant relocation, never feeling a sense of belonging, and the growing and rapidly changing demographics of my current context that birthed the desire to bridge the gap between church and community. Some people are in the community of my context that the church hasn't intentionally engaged. I believe that there are needs in this community that are often unnoticed, excluded, and bypassed. I believe now that the

leaders of Gethsemane have participated in this biblical hospitality journey, they are now equipped to engage the community in which the church resides.

This chapter confirms that leaders in both the church and the community can be equipped to engage the community with humility through a biblical hospitality model that emphasizes inclusivity to the lost and left out, regardless of racial, economic, and cultural barriers. Through the work of this project model, there is a renewed ecclesial posture that stands to confront cultural and societal division, welcoming the excluded into the presence of Christ while building a bridge to a cross-cultural community.

As previously stated, the project went very well, but there were a couple of unforeseen challenges. Because Sunday after church was the best day to accommodate consistent engagement of the participants, the members of the church took a minute to clear the fellowship hall so that the delayed project starting times. The first week, there was an unanticipated equipment malfunction that prevented me from showing my PowerPoint presentation. In addition, the meal I ordered was also late, which caused further delay. Once the food arrived and we were settled, we ate together, and then I started the presentation. About thirty minutes into the presentation, the room became warm, and we had a heavy meal, so everyone, including me, got sleepy. This unexpected challenge required an earlier break and a longer break than I originally planned. But it made for a long day, extending the original planned session time. Despite the initial disruption, the session progressed successfully.

The second week, I ordered a lighter lunch, but when it was being picked up, it was not ready because they had misplaced the order. The food that was delayed eventually arrived, and what could have been another point of frustration became a

moment of shared humor. An additional adjustment had to be made for the outdoor Fun Day that was disrupted due to rain, requiring a pivot to an indoor fellowship meal, which turned out great. I am sure this would be considered a challenge apart from the first day, but because of the rich engaging dialogue, it often led into the session, extending beyond the scheduled time, which enhanced the fellowship experience.

What I would consider doing differently is seeking to invite more members from their community to enhance diversity. The overall project, despite the challenges, was a great experience, and the participants are still talking about it. It is my desire for Gethsemane, since it sits in the heart of Davidson, North Carolina, to establish a ministry that meets the needs of a diverse community, although they may never seek to attend church there. I would like the community to know that we will be a ministry for all people of the community. I am planning to implement this project again to include other ministry leaders and potential leaders. I have also considered the possibility of publishing this project.

APPENDIX A

PRE-TEST SURVEY QUESTIONS

Pre-Test Survey Questions

1. What is your understanding of humility in serving?
2. Are you currently serving in a church ministry?

   If yes, what ministry?
   If no, would you be interested in serving in a church ministry? Which ministry?
3. Do you have a spirit of humility in serving? Explain.
4. What is your understanding of Biblical Hospitality?
5. Why is it important for the church to be hospitable to people regardless of economic, racial and societal differences?
6. How can the church become more effective in inviting people in the surrounding community to church?
7. How can the church make people feel welcome when they come to the church?
8. What can church leaders do to encourage biblical hospitality in the church?
9. What is your understanding of discipleship?
10. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Yes____ No____ Don't know____
11. How do you make disciples of Jesus Christ?
12. Do you trust the church? Why or why not?
13. What can the church do to gain your trust?
14. Do you attend worship services regularly? Why or why not?
15. Do you prefer to attend church virtually or in-person?
16. Are you involved actively in ministry? Why or why not?
17. What needs would you like the church to address for you and your family?
18. What outreach/community events would you like the church to sponsor?

19. How would you prefer the church to communicate with you?

    Phone_____ Email _____Text_____

20. How can the church better engage people of different cultures?

21. Do you feel equipped to engage the surrounding community? Why or why not?

APPENDIX B

POST-TEST SURVEY QUESTIONS

Post-Test Survey Questions

1. What is your understanding of humility in serving?
2. Are you currently serving in a church ministry?

   If yes, what ministry?
   If no, would you be interested in serving in a church ministry? Which ministry?
3. Do you have a spirit of humility in serving? Explain.
4. What is your understanding of Biblical Hospitality?
5. Why is it important for the church to be hospitable to people regardless of economic, racial and societal differences?
6. How can the church become more effective in inviting people in the surrounding community to church?
7. How can the church make people feel welcome when they come to the church?
8. What can church leaders do to encourage biblical hospitality in the church?
9. What is your understanding of discipleship?
10. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Yes____ No____ Don't know____
11. How do you make disciples of Jesus Christ?
12. Do you trust the church? Why or why not?
13. What can the church do to gain your trust?
14. Do you attend worship services regularly? Why or why not?
15. Do you prefer to attend church virtually or in-person?
16. Are you involved actively in ministry? Why or why not?
17. What needs would you like the church to address for you and your family?
18. What outreach/community events would you like the church to sponsor?

19. How would you prefer the church to communicate with you?

    Phone_____ Email _____Text_____

20. How can the church better engage people of different cultures?

21. Do you feel equipped to engage the surrounding community? Why or why not?

APPENDIX C

PRE-AND POST-TEST SURVEY RESULTS

Pre and Post Test Survey Results

Note: P means participant

Pre and Post Test Survey Questions	Pre-Test Survey Results	Post-Test Survey Results
1. What is your understanding of humility in serving?	P1: One's ability to be humble while attempting to guide others. P2: My understanding of humility in serving is, we must serve as a blessing towards others. Understanding that as we serve, we serve with a level of love and compassion. P3: In my opinion, humility is identifying with the person you are ministering to. P4: Humility in serving is serving in a selfless capacity. Doing from the heart for others. P5: Serving others P6: The ability to serve without question. P7: Helping others in need. P8: Doing it for the Glory of God; not for the Glory of self. P9: Checking your own desires, comfort level, and thoughts in order to serve/meet the needs of others.	P1: Remaining humble while dealing with others. Not appearing as though we are a "better" Christian. P2: That true Biblical Hospitality is rooted in humility. Our serving ought to match that of Jesus whereas he served unconditionally. P3: Serving with love in your service. P5: My understanding of humility in serving is putting others before self without being seen. P6: Humility is being able to not judge; to put your own agenda aside. Go beyond the walls to serve. P8: Putting others before us and removing "person" from it; serving because it is a privilege and not because we deserve it. P9: Humility in service means to put the needs of others before your own. To serve from a place of love and not of a place/mindset of position.
2. Are you currently serving in a church ministry? If yes, what ministry? If no, would you be interested in serving in a church ministry? Which ministry?	P1: Yes. Media P2: Yes. Prayer, Teens, Men P3: Yes. Deacons, Outreach, Men, and Ushers P4: Yes. Women's P5: Yes. Children's Ministry P6: Yes. Music, Trustee, Sound, Deacon one day P7: Yes. Usher Ministry P8: Yes. Usher Ministry President; Outreach Ministry; S.A.L.T.Y Women's Ministry P9: Yes. Associate Minister, Ministry Coordinator, Prayer Ministry, Christian Education, Choir	P1: Media P2: Yes. Men's Ministry, Teen Ministry, Prayer P3: Yes, Deacon in training, Usher, Men's, Outreach P5: Yes, I am currently serving in the Youth Ministry. P6: Yes, Music Ministry P8: Yes; Usher President, C3 Ministry Leader P9: Yes. Associate Minister, Choir, Women's Ministry and Prayer Ministry

3. Do you have a spirit of humility in serving? Explain.	P1: Yes. I feel as though working in media brings people who are not attending in person the chance to feel part of the service. My goal is to present the best opportunity for them. P2: Yes. I feel that when I'm serving, I try to meet people where they are. I like to make sure others feel valued and that we serve others by being authentic and true. P3: I believe I possess a spirit of humility in that I try to relate to the person or group I minister to. P4: Yes. I have a spirit of humility. I take pride in doing for others with no expectations. P5: Yes, love to help others and engage/fellowship with one another. Be helpful when I can and try to have a positive impact on others. P6: Yes. I believe you can't ask a person to serve if you're not willing to do it yourself. A leader is a servant always. P7: I think so. Not sure/Feeling better afterwards. P8: Yes. Remembering who it is I am working for and why I do it; Unselfishly. P9: Yes, I believe so. I attempt to decrease, so that the needs of others can be met; and so that they will see God and not me.	P1: Yes. I try to make sure I focus on learning equipment and remaining humble when I am serving everyone while in the media booth. P2: If I'm being honest, not always. I do feel I operate more on the humility side vs the other. But oftentimes I can focus on how I think it should be, or get caught up in thinking why should I be the only one doing it. P3: Yes. I approach my duties with love and a spirit of duty. P5: Having a spirit of humility in serving, which I believe I do have without seeking credit – just focusing on others, not self. P6: Yes. I believe to be silent, patient. And I believe to put people before yourself. Give your talents, gifts back to God. P8: Yes. To me it is an honor to serve. Showing others who God really is and not being selfish in any way. P9: Yes, I always attempt to serve others out of love and not base it on my own comforts. I also try not or prefer to serve "in the background".
4. What is your understanding of Biblical Hospitality?	P1: Our presence in the community to reach out to in order to bring people in P2: Biblical Hospitality should reflect Christ characteristics – love, compassion, joy, etc. whether in the church house or	P1: Being kind and welcome those in need. P2: My understanding of Biblical Hospitality is that it all starts with genuine relationship with Christ. Then from there we must demonstrate Christ-like love toward all margins of people. Not only

	in the grocery store, we ought to be hospitable on every front. P3: I would say, serving in the same way Christ served the people He was teaching. P4: Biblical Hospitality reminds me of how Jesus gave many examples of being a servant as He served others and provided parables to show us the importance of hospitality to include feeding, clothing, foot washing, providing for the needy. P5: No answer P6: Treating people with the love of God. Giving them word of God with love, understanding. P7: Helping others understand the bible. P8: Showing love to others; doing for them what Christ has done for me. P9: Serving others and making them a priority.	looking out for the people who can repay but more importantly the ones who can't. P3: Biblical Hospitality is treating people of all walks of life the same way Jesus ministered to the Blind, Deaf, Poor and Demon Possessed. P5: My understanding of Biblical Hospitality is showing love and care toward others. Making them (everyone) feel welcome, feel as if they belong regardless of background, race, beliefs, etc. P6: Looking at Word and treating people the way God requires. P8: Showing love to strangers, unbelievers, and believers. P9: It is rooted in humility and love. It is to be of service without expectation of getting something or a desire to be seen.
5. Why is it important for the church to be hospitable to people regardless of economic, racial and societal differences?	P1: To show everyone the same kindness. P2: It is important because everyone is not on the same level economically, racially or have the same societal differences. However, we all play a vital role, and we can impact more people when we have a more broader scope rather than a narrow scope. P3: You must show grace toward people to gain their trust. P4: As an extension of Christ and if we proclaim to be Christ-like disciples, people look to the church to see how we demonstrate the love of God. We show through our service to	P1: Showing inclusivity is important to make others feel welcomed and valued. P2: Because it shows we don't have limits on who we serve. Also, the church can benefit because then we will become a melting pot of all kinds. P3: You can't bring people to Jesus or salvation if they don't first feel welcome and appreciated. P5: It's important for the church to be hospitable to people regardless of economic, racial and societal differences because it reflects the love of Christ through us (the church), who we are. Showing love and grace.

	others by meeting the needs regardless of race, creed, color or economic differences. P5: It is important I believe because I feel we should not judge anyone because of their differences, beliefs, racial, etc. Love one another regardless of the differences as God loves each one of us. P6: Because we all have come short and life can hit anyone. No one is bigger than the next. P7: So that maybe they come back to church. P8: Jesus showed love to those who others would have walked past – because it's what Jesus would do. P9: Because we are the body of Christ and all folks should feel loved and welcomed by the church.	P6: The church doesn't know where a person can be in their life. What need they may have. We might be their last point of contact. God says, clearly says Don't judge, Go to them that need help, Show love. P8: So that everyone can be accepted, appreciated, and welcomed. P9: Because we are to be examples of Christ and the love of God! God's love is unconditional and He extends that to all.
6. How can the church become more effective in inviting people in the surrounding community to church?	P1: Participate in community events – tables up at county fair, downtown events P2: By being more intentional about our footprint in the community. Hosting community events that give back to the area we serve. Taking time to love on our guests when they visit our church. Reaching back out to those who come for the first time. P3: By displaying the values of Christ and showing others a different way toward peace. P4: The church can become more effective by being intentional about reaching out in the community to invite the outside in, this may require stepping outside our comfort zone and considering doing	P1: Meet and greet. Knowing what is needed to bring them into the church. P2: By being intentional and getting an understanding of what the needs of the community are. Then actively creating times to go out and meet their needs. P3: By not showing any preference or partiality toward anyone just because they may be different or don't look or act the way they want them to. P5: The church can become more effective in inviting people around the community to church by going outside the walls of the church. Getting to know others, inviting them to church. P6: Witnessing, Outreach, Social, Prison Ministry; open to starting groups to pull people in that need help.

	things different – a change on our approach. P5: I believe going out as a small group or just a few and passing out flyers and introducing ourselves and inviting them to come and fellowship with us. Not pressuring anyone, just giving out information and showing the love of God. P6: Get out. Pass out tracks. Outreach. Do different programs to show the community we are more than just one-sided. P7: Inviting more people local. P8: Going out into the community; sharing the gospel with those who don't know it. P9: By showing ourselves friendly.	P8: Reaching from beyond the walls of the building; showing hospitality to everyone we meet outside. P9: By demonstrating God's love to them. Utilizing door signs and by being more visible in the community.
7. How can the church make people feel welcome when they come to the church?	P1: Welcome/visitor packets include background info about church, include a goodie, maybe small journal or pen. P2: By loving on them and showing them we are happy they are here. Having a gift or small token of appreciation (pin, candy, card). Follow-up via call, text. P3: By making people feel welcome and displaying genuine love towards them. P4: We can make people feel welcome by extending kindness, inclusion and follow-up. Also, not being judgmental. P5: Make sure to talk with them before they leave, introducing ourselves, and getting their contact information to make sure to stay in contact with them.	P1: Recognizing them as a guest, talking to them, including them, know them. P2: By being lovable. Welcoming them with a smile. Not judging them. P3: By recognizing them for who they are without reservation. P5: The church can make people feel welcome when they come to church by introducing themselves, loving on the guests, keeping in contact with them, making sure they are okay and checking to see if there's anything we as the church can do for them. P6: Not calling them visitors. Acknowledging them. Making them feel loved and belonged. Reaching out during the week to check on them – a call or email. P8: Greeting everyone with love and kind words. P9: By being kind to them, not looking them up and down. Acknowledging them and maybe have some sort of Welcome gift.

	P6: By not putting standards on how they come in. Let God clean them up. P7: Greeting them with a smile and hug, open arms. P8: By embracing every non-member who comes through the door. Showing love to them. Talking with them. P9: Sharing a smile, kind word, and asking if they need anything.	
8. What can church leaders do to encourage biblical hospitality in the church?	P1: Encourage members to attend events. P2: Be present…we must be able to show that we want to grow. P3: We must lead by example. If we want our members to show Biblical Hospitality, we must exhibit the same toward them. P4: Church leaders can encourage biblical hospitality through leading by example, supporting the Pastor and having an open mind. P5: Talk with one another about what they know/do. Share with one another, especially with others who really aren't sure. P6: Being approachable and not thinking, acting, looking like they have arrived. Just be real. P7: Spreading the word. P8: Live the life that leaders should live; be different than the world. P9: Lead by example.	P1: Set the example – stay involved with activities. P2: Be present. However, for those that are present, we should continue to learn our people who are coming, and effectively meet their needs. P3: Train members and lead by example in displaying Biblical Hospitality. P5: Church leaders can teach, pray, speak about Jesus to show Biblical Hospitality. Sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. P6: Not judge – no clicks – not think a person want their spot P8: Teaching others how important it is to show love for everyone, especially the unbelievers. P9: We can be more biblically hospitable. Not think more highly of ourselves/positions than we ought to.
9. What is your understanding of discipleship?	P1: Doing our best to live as an example of Christ. P2: That a disciple is one who is a learner of God's word. P3: Discipleship is believing in and following Christ without reservation.	P1: Learning and following Christian beliefs. P2: That discipleship is an ongoing process. A disciple of Jesus is one who is a continued learner of the one he follows (Jesus).

	P4: My understanding of discipleship is to be a follower of Christ, to draw others to Him through teaching/sharing the Word, sharing of His goodness. P5: Serve & believe in Jesus. P6: To know the word, live it, honor it, and let your lifestyle speak it. P7: Implying the rules. P8: Equipping members/people with the Word of God; so they are able to defend it when the time comes. P9: Walking in faith w/someone in their pursuit of Jesus. Helping them to learn and grow in their faith and knowledge of God.	P3: Following Jesus without reservation. P5: My understanding of discipleship is living as His follower, being more Christ-like. P6: Knowing the Word. Applying it (Lifestyle). P8: Bringing someone or teaching someone about Christ. P9: Teaching/training in the teachings of Christ. Becoming more Christ-like.
10. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Yes No Don't know	P1: Yes. I try to always do my best. I want others to see me and know I'm doing my best. P2: Yes P3: Yes P4: Yes. I consider myself a disciple. P5: Yes P6: Yes, I try. Not perfect, lol. P7: I don't know P8: Yes P9: Yes	P1: Yes P2: Yes P3: Yes, I would say I am. P5: Yes, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. P6: Yes P8: Yes P9: Yes
11. How do you make disciples of Jesus Christ?	P1: Setting examples. P2: Taking time walking along a new or even older saint, praying, reading, holding others accountable to God's word. P3: By telling your story of how Christ brought you from where you were to where you are now. P4: You make disciples by/through the guidance of Holy Spirit, studying His Word, sharing how my relationship with Him has changed my life and drawn me closer. Sharing that you don't have to be perfect.	P1: Form relationships and fellowship with people. P2: Yes P3: By living the way Jesus would live and by telling your story of the way Jesus made a difference in your life. P5: I make disciples of Jesus Christ by building relationships with others, loving them, and live like Him. P6: Offering people the Word of God. Showing them a lifestyle with your actions. P8: Teaching the Word in a way that draws people to Christ.

	P5: No answer P6: Showing them the way to Christ, presenting salvation. P7: I don't know P8: Searching the Word; holding those accountable who are being taught the word. P9: Teaching and sharing the Gospel. Living it out, not just talking the talk.	P9: Sharing the love of God; leading others to Christ, and sharing my testimony.
12. Do you trust the church? Why or why not?	P1: Yes. Church leaders/staff reflect trust. P2: Yes. The church, I trust, however, sometimes it is the people inside that can have me second guessing. P3: Absolutely, with no equivocation. They help me to grow in my faith. P4: Trust the church-not sure, but full trust in God. P5: I trust many people in the church but have also been hurt by "the church". P6: Yes P7: Yes P8: No, I trust the Spirit and the person who God put in charge of the church (Pastor). P9: No answer	P1: Yes, to both. I feel the overall church provides an example by which Christians should follow. At least ideally. As a whole, overall GBC is a warm and welcoming church. P2: Local church: sometimes. Global: yes. It is not so much the "church" rather it is the people. P3: I trust the Gospel and I trust the Bible and the institution of truth. P5: Church is made up of imperfect people. P6: Yes. I feel We all have had bad situations. That should not stop you from coming. P8: Yes. I trust the universal church. There are no conditions, stipulations, or any false teachings. P9: Yes and No. I trust the church to love and lead, but I do not trust that it always operates with the best intentions.
13. What can the church do to gain your trust?	P1: I feel very confident as is. P2: Love one another. Being present. Being consistent. P3: Continue to help me grow in the knowledge and wisdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. P4: The church can gain my trust by how they respect members, pastor and not being self-motivated but making decisions that benefit the whole church. P5: Continue to reach out and showing love.	P1: Initially I wasn't sure how to feel but truly the majority are good to me and I believe sincere and honest. This makes me feel positive about the overall feelings and intentions of the leaders of GBC. P2: By actively taking the time to participate in ministry. Understanding that everyone plays a role in serving here at the church. P3: Exhibit the qualities of the Bible and of Jesus's life here on earth. P5: Living out what is taught is a way to gain my trust in the church,

	P6: Dealing with traditional ways. P7: Help out more P8: I completely trust the universal church; If God's people who frequent the building treated the Shepherd the way God intended, Christ may come. P9: I am not sure. Too many inconsistencies.	regardless of education, background, etc. P6: I trust God – so I believe he will lead and guide me. P8: Already trust the universal church. P9: Operate more out of genuine love than from a place of money-seeking or self-serving.
14. Do you attend worship services regularly? Why or why not?	P1: I love the lessons that are given thru example. P2: Yes. I feel it is a vital role for my Christian growth. Also, it helps my relationship with other believers. P3: Yes! I want to grow and to help my fellowman to grow along with me. P4: Yes P5: Yes, because I want to continue to grow in the word and learn all that I can about Jesus. P6: Yes, encouragement P7: Yes, to worship God as a church P8: Yes, I choose to worship God no matter what I may be going through. P9: Yes, because I love the Lord and He is deserving of my time, worship, praise, and adoration.	P1: Yes, listening and participating in services is rewarding. It's a feeling of comfort to hear the Word. P2: Yes, because I feel it's vital to my Christian growth. Also, it gives me the opportunity to fellowship with other believers. P3: Absolutely. God has been instrumental in being where I am today and I would hate to think where I would be without His guidance and love. P5: Yes, I attend worship service regularly to fellowship with others, be in the presence amongst God's people. P6: Yes. I love worship. I believe it is a time show God just how much he means to me. I enjoy worship. Praise is different than worship. P8: Yes. Church is the place where I feel I need in order to be better equipped with more information outside of my personal study time. P9: Yes, because God has been far more gracious to me than I deserve. Also, to learn His Word and how to apply it in my own life and then be able to share with others.
15. Do you prefer to attend church virtually or in-person?	P1: In person P2: In-person P3: I prefer in person unless something unforeseen occurs. P4: In-person P5: In person	P1: In-person – but either P2: In person P3: My preference is in-person, but, when necessary, virtual will just have to do. P5: In person church is what I prefer.

	P6: In-person. Virtually, I don't feel I retain. P7: Both P8: In person P9: In-person	P6: In person P8: In person P9: In-person
16. Are you involved actively in ministry? Why or why not?	P1: Not as much as I would like to be. Our distance presents an obstacle. P2: Yes, because I love to serve, being a part of helping grow the church. P3: Yes. It helps me learn more of what I need to know to be a better Christian. P4: Yes P5: Yes, I am a person who likes to help others any way I can and definitely don't have to be acknowledged for what I do. I do because I love to do. P6: Yes. I have been blessed with a gift. P7: Yes, because it's my duty. P8: Yes, I don't believe God has given gifts to me just to sit on them or keep them to myself. I believe they were given to me to share with others. P9: Yes, because God has been so good and gracious to me; And it brings me joy and purpose.	P1: Work in progress. P2: Yes, because my heart for the youth and wanting to let them know God has a plan for them. Also, I just love to serve. P3: Yes, I try to be involved as much as I can, so I feel I am answering God's call to serve. P5: Yes, because I love to help, love the children, and love not to be put on the "spotlight" but doing what I do in the ministry I'm in because of the love of Christ. P6: Yes. I was given a gift to use for God. P8: Yes. I have a heart for service and working in ministry allows me to share my gifts from God. P9: Yes, because I love God and truly desire to be a servant; to help others.
17. What needs would you like the church to address for you and your family?	P1: My needs are met. P2: Counseling P3: Just help me to become the best me I can be. P4: I would like for the church to continue to show support. P5: None, at the moment. P6: I have a bi-racial family, and I feel that some don't see us as the same. P7: Therapy P8: None (at the moment) P9: Prayer, discipline, spiritual warfare, opportunity for	P1: We are good with the way we are. Living a 1.5 away limits our ability to be more active. P2: For the kids. Just to have more of a presence. Being able to create more of a platform for them to express themselves. Dance, tutoring, etc. P3: Keep us in prayer P5: None at the moment. P6: Understanding a multi-cultural family. Two different cultures coming together to grow in God. P8: None

	deeper/more intimate connections, more, consistent opportunities for my daughters to engage in worship, ministry, and spiritual growth.	P9: More consistent ministries that address the needs of the family individually and collectively.
18. What outreach/community events would you like the church to sponsor?	P1: I think we cover this well. P2: Community Service Day. Dog Washing Day. Praise in the Park. P3: Reaching out to more less fortunate folks and helping them meet their needs. P4: The church is currently doing a great job with outreach. I would like to see events that would invite others inside. P5: Not sure, at the moment. P6: Men groups. Youth Convention P7: Football games/more events P8: Holiday events (Sharegiving dinner); Summer picnics for the public, etc. P9: Free Prayer/Hugs Event, Community Block Party	P2: Dog Wash Day for the surrounding neighbors. P3: Reaching people where they are and addressing their needs as well as praying for them and talking about a life with Christ. P5: No answer P6: Tent Meeting, Outreach, Small Group Ministry. P8: Evangelizing outside of the church. P9: Community-wide Prayer, feeding programs, “pop-up” worship services in places like hospitals, prisons, shelters, etc.
19. How would you prefer the church to communicate with you? Phone Email Text	P1: Any P2: Phone P3: Phone, email, text P4: Phone, Email & Text P5: Phone, text or email, either is okay P6: Phone, email or text P7: Text P8: Text or Email P9: (660) 238-1488 (text)	P2; Phone P3: Email P5: Email, text P6: Phone, email, text; it doesn’t matter P8: Any way is fine P9: Email and text
20. How can the church better engage people of different cultures?	P1: More exposure at respective events. P2: Broader view. Get out of the normal way of church. Various music… P3: Identifying areas where we see eye to eye and developing a relationship. P4: Sponsor events geared towards other cultures. P5: Not sure, at the moment.	P2: Being open-minded to other styles of worship. P3: Listen to them like they are the only person on the planet and engage with them like they are family they love. P5: Church can engage people of different cultures by being willing to change and accept other ways. Ex. Types of music; Not judging people.

	P6: Be open. Get out of tradition. P7: Relate to today times. P8: By treating them as though they are our fellow brothers and sisters regardless to what culture they are from P9: Stop seeing ourselves as a "Black" church, learn to engage in a variety of worship styles; and be willing to step out of our comfort zones.	P6: Invite them. Different music. Engage in new area outside to show we are a multi-cultural church. P8: By remembering that people from every nation will be joined together in heaven one day, so it's important to remember that when engaging other cultures. P9: Step out of our comfort zones. We need to stop making our own preferences as the priority and instead seek to do the will of God. We have to be more open-minded and less judgmental. We also have to do things in an orderly, consistent, and timely manner.
21. Do you feel equipped to engage the surrounding community? Why or why not?	P1: I do not feel comfortable or equipped to engage in community activities or events as a representative of GBC. P2: I feel like biblical Hospitality is important for our local churches and communities. But I don't feel equipped because of my lack of understanding. I'm hoping that through this course I will gain a better understanding of Biblical Hospitality and the roll I play in it. P3: I would feel equipped to engage the part of the community I identify with, being a black man. I would not feel comfortable trying to engage with folk I have very little knowledge of or little understanding of how the operate or make them who they are. It all comes down to how approachable they present themselves when encountered. Each of us is a unique individual and some are more receptive than others.	P1: After our meetings and review of the related materials and topics, I felt a stronger and more intentional need to be more accepting of others and to fellowship with those that I would not normally share a circle with. Learning the importance of accepting those that are not the same as me, not only to my "table", but with a more deliberate effort to engage them has become a major goal. It also became apparent to me that stepping out of my comfort zone to welcome others is a much-needed additional step in my personal discipleship journey. I feel a stronger need to apply this in my daily life and to outwardly practice Christian networking within the surrounding community. Thank you for including Borris and I in your project. In the beginning, I didn't know how to articulate what I was interpreting from the lessons you provided. But by the second session, I realized that through the group lessons and conversations, I need to be more humble, which in turn has shown me how to operate with more humility in my day-to-day life. As cliché as it

	P4: As we enter into this project, I would say not really; that I have some basic knowledge of how to engage the surrounding community however I do not have a full understanding of the biblical principles that guide us in a Christ like manner in ways to serve and meet the needs of the community within the church and outside of the church. I look forward to learning through this project and collaborating with the other participants on how to demonstrate authentic hospitality using biblical research and other methods that will be discussed within this project. P5: At this moment, I do not feel equipped to engage the surrounding community. That is because, personally, I don't feel comfortable. I would like to gain more knowledge, understanding, and strength as to how to be more effective to others when going out in the community. Once I become more comfortable and gain more knowledge, I feel I would be more wiser to others when engaging the surrounding community. P6: I don't feel I am equipped. I mean I have been out witnessing before when I was younger, but I felt like they were pressuring instead of showing how God really is …I also didn't fully know how to engage … it has always been kinda intimidating. I also felt like I had to be on some kind of level with God	sounds, it really has become a "what would Jesus do" moment for me. P2: Yes, I feel better equipped to engage the surrounding community with Biblical Hospitality. Knowing that Biblical Hospitality is not a standard set by man rather by God, that helps me to know it's all about His character and attributes that need to be shown. Just like Disney, how they offer an extensive hospitality training, I feel that it is important for our local churches as well so that our community can all be on the same page. P3: I do feel better equipped to engage the community regarding Biblical Hospitality for the simple fact, I attend a lot of community-based events where folks from all walks of life are there, and I interact with as many of them as time allows. The results are better than one would expect given today's political climate and society's grip on misinformation and deception. There is always room for folks to agree on subjects that relate to conditions in our communities as opposed to the deception that conditions are far worse than they really are. P4: After participating in this project, I would say that I feel better equipped. The opportunity to learn and engage with the other participants offered greater insight into the true meaning of hospitality and having a servants heart. Some of the ways to show that I am better equipped would begin with the passion behind showing hospitality. I have complete buy in to the importance of serving others and creating a space for the unseen. Jesus chose to serve and fellowship with the least likely ones to be chosen.

	before I engaged people … just being honest P7: I don't feel equipped because I don't understand what it is and how it plays out in church P8: I would like to think that I am equipped to engage those in the surrounding community. The Christian thing to do is to address the needs of others regardless of who they are. I can remember many years ago, someone noticed me at work, broken and confused. They showed love to me by taking the time to learn more about what I was dealing with, and eventually introduced me to Jesus then shared with me how Jesus had saved them, and the way their life had been transformed through Jesus. Because of the way I was engaged in a conversation, it makes it so easy for me to engage others the same way. By putting aside my personal issues and focusing more on the need(s) of someone else, I feel equipped to go out and do the same. Do I feel like I may miss something in the process, probably so, but I truly believe that if I am successful in showing the true meaning of Jesus' love, then that would equate to me being fully equipped to show biblical hospitality to someone. P9: My understanding of Biblical Hospitality is generally rooted in the work that folks do within the Usher/Greeter and Culinary Ministries. Basically, I have understood Hospitality ministries to be about meeting	Being equipped means I would put self aside, create inclusion of others that may not look like or act like me, much like the Disney culture that promotes belonging, respect and collaboration. I would get to know those in the community be it the church or outside of the walls of the church seeking to address the needs and help the wounded like Henry Dunant the founder of the American Red Cross. Durant believed all sick and wounded should be cared for, no one left behind the same way Jesus cares for us. P5: Based on the information received and learned regarding Biblical Hospitality, I do feel better equipped to engage the surrounding community because I view everyday interactions as blessed opportunities to extend compassion, generosity and showing up. As I learned more about Biblical Hospitality, I understand that it's not just about opening our homes but our time, attention and resources in a way that reflects God's love. It resembles the intentional "imagineering" attitude at Disney which they create spaces of belonging by anticipating needs and treating strangers as valued guests. I feel it's important to engage the surrounding community because when you make someone feel welcome, valued, etc. it has the power to build trust (as I can speak from personal experience) just as Jean-Henri Dunant showed his simple act of caring for wounded soldiers at Solferino offering water, comfort, and humanitarian aid. Biblical Hospitality calls us to notice the people that is being "overlooked", "to help others before being asked", and "make our community a place of joy and safety.

	the physical and/or social needs of folks when they come into the church. This is particularly the case when it relates to visitors. I have always looked at those ministries as the church's attempt to put their 'best foot forward' when engaging visitors and when having social events within the church. Since these are not my own personal strong suits, I have typically viewed hospitality as the gift of 'others' and not of my own wheelhouse.	P6: Based on the information I received regarding Biblical Hospitality; I can confidently say that I feel significantly better equipped to engage with the surrounding community. The project has truly broadened my perspective and deepened my understanding of what biblical hospitality entails. Previously, I might have primarily associated hospitality with welcoming people into a church setting or my home. However, this study has profoundly clarified that true biblical hospitality extends far beyond those traditional boundaries. It's not merely an act performed within the walls of a building, but rather a dynamic and outward-focused expression of God's love and grace in every sphere of life. The sessions allowed me to look at this concept from various theological and practical angles, highlighting its foundational role in Christian living. I now understand it as a call to actively seek out opportunities to serve, show compassion, and genuinely connect with people in our daily lives, reflecting Christ's character wherever we are. This means intentionally fostering welcoming environments and demonstrating kindness in my neighborhood, workplace, and all public interactions, thus "showing who God is" through my actions and attitude, rather than simply inviting others to a specific location. I am grateful for the insights gained, and I believe they will profoundly influence how I interact with and contribute to my community moving forward. P7: Yes, I do feel better equipped. I have a better understanding of what biblical hospitality is and how to use

		it in my community and the usher ministry where I serve. P8: By demonstrating care and thoughtfulness, biblical hospitality encourages us to intentionally meet the needs of others. Often times we believe that biblical hospitality is about what WE have to give. However, biblical hospitality has nothing to do with us as a whole, it is about US being available to give. Genuine, unconditional love is exemplified through biblical hospitality, which prioritizes the needs of others over one's own, reflecting God's extraordinary acceptance of humanity. Biblical hospitality is catering to those who are in need, those are sick, those are homeless, and those who don't have the things that we typically have. Biblical hospitality is also about caring for God people the way that God would care for his people. Sometimes biblical hospitality requires us to go places that we may not otherwise go and show hospitality to those who we would not ordinarily communicate with At Disney, every person is treated like a cherished guest, making them feel valued and connected to the community. Biblical hospitality stresses the importance of warmly welcoming others, including strangers, as they are all created in God's image and deserve open-hearted generosity. Both biblical hospitality and the Disney model prioritize welcoming others and making guests feel valued. P9: In part, yes, I do feel better equipped however, there remains some uncertainty on how to fully carry it out in relation to the communities I (we) serve. By being reminded of how Jesus describes

		Biblical Hospitality and its expectations, I now have a more complete understanding, and this definitely makes me feel more equipped to reach out to those within and especially, outside of the church walls. In addition, learning about the experiences and successes of the historical figures such as Jean-Henri Dunant and scholars such as Robert Schnase, and the Disney method have opened my eyes to the realization that: it only takes one obedient servant to have a lasting impact on the community and within the Kingdom of God; effective hospitality will require a mix of traditional and radical strategies and a willingness to step out of our comfort zones (especially to reach those who may not be 'similar' to us or like-minded); and finally, that kindness and a guest-centered approach can increase our ability to reach the lost and support the local body. The uncertainty that remains is due in large part to internal struggles with socialization, but also having limited information on what Biblical Hospitality looks like in present day. It is still somewhat unclear on how one goes about reaching within and beyond the walls in innovative ways.

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